Interview with Robert H. Miller

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR ROBERT H. MILLER

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: This an interview with Ambassador Robert H. Miller on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy and today is May 23, 1990.

I wonder if you could give me a little bit about your background—where did you come from?

MILLER: I was born in Port Angeles, Washington, in 1927. I had no connection with the Foreign Service in my family background. I went to Stanford University in 1943 and graduated in 1949 after taking two years out for the Army. During the immediate post-war period, like many young people, I was attracted to public service in order to contribute to building a better world. In the second half of my undergraduate career at Stanford, I got interested particularly in the State Department and in the Foreign Service. I had some GI Bill left after graduating from Stanford, so I got a Masters degree in International Affairs at Harvard. From there I went into the State Department through a junior management intern program. Harvard nominated me for the program after I had passed the requisite Civil Service exam, and the State Department accepted me along with 20 or 25 graduating students from other universities and colleges for the 1951-52 intern class.

Q: This was about 1951?

MILLER: September 1951. I was “Wristonized” into the Foreign Service in 1956, and have been there ever since.

Q: What did you do when you first came into the State Department as an intern?

MILLER: The Junior Management intern program at that time consisted of a two-week orientation program at FSI followed by three three-month assignments in different offices of the Department. The State Department was committed to give us permanent jobs after successful completion of the intern program.

My first assignment was in the Office of International Conferences at 1776 Pennsylvania Ave., NW. I thought it was interesting at the beginning, but realized fairly quickly that it was a fairly routine job, engaged in routine preparations of U.S. delegations for innumerable international conferences and meetings. My second intern assignment was in the Office of European Regional Affairs in the European Bureau, which was the office backstopping the U.S. NATO delegation in Paris. It was an exciting office to work in at the time because NATO was brand new and a central element of U.S. containment policy—this was the beginning of 1952. When I got there as an intern the whole office was feverishly working on preparations for the Lisbon Meeting of the NATO Foreign Ministers which approved the first force levels for NATO. This was a very big and important subject and the office was really humming. Larry Vass, my immediate boss, offered me a permanent job and I left the intern program because of the real career opportunity opening up to me in NATO affairs.

I felt badly about bolting the intern program, but that experience taught me an important lesson in life—and in career development: the institution can offer you great opportunities, and being accepted into the intern program was one such opportunity. But, for a young person with little or no experience and, as in my case, to whom all jobs in the Department looked awesome and exciting at first, the institution will not, indeed cannot, help one to

discriminate among possible job choices, which are likely to influence the course of an entire career.

After three months in the Office of International Conferences, I knew enough to realize I did not want to make a career of international conference administration and that I was ready to move on. Then, after three months in European Regional Affairs, which was dealing with central U.S. foreign policy issues at the time, I was better able to distinguish between foreign policy substance and foreign policy process. I knew I wanted the former and not the latter.

However, if I had gone on to finish the internship program with a third 3-month assignment that still had not been identified as far as I recall, I had no reason to expect the NATO job to be kept for me, nor did I have the vaguest assurance that my third assignment would lead to a permanent job equal to the NATO job. Had I left these decisions to the institution —the intern program administrators—I could have ended up with a very different career path. And given the major reduction-in-force instituted by John Foster Dulles a year later, and what happened to many fellow interns from my class as a result, I still feel my first major career choice in the State Department was a wise one for me.

I dwell on this at some length because it is relevant today to young people trying to sort out career choices today.

Anyway, European Regional Affairs was an exciting office to work in and I was fortunate to be offered a permanent job and I stayed there.

Q: Did you get any feel at that time for the difference between those who were in the Civil Service and the Foreign Service? How were they melding them together?

MILLER: As I recall, most of the professionals in the Office of European Regional Affairs were in Civil Service. I therefore found myself surrounded at the beginning of my career by Civil Servants, all of whom I thought were top notch. I had a high regard for, and lived

in awe of, the more senior people. The office at the time was headed by Edwin M. Martin, who at the time was a Civil Servant who had spent time in OSS in Washington and other wartime agencies. My immediate boss was Larry Vass, also a Civil Servant. The others subordinate to Vass in that office I am quite certain were all, or mostly, Civil Service. Many of them, I suspect, had been hired either because of their technical background in economics or their political-military background. Probably a lot of them had been in military service— some of them had been in OSS, like Martin—and I think a number of them had come into the State Department, which was growing by leaps and bounds at the time through either military or civil service wartime connections. There were occasional Foreign Service officers, a number of whom also had been taken into the Foreign Service under the provisions of the War Manpower Act.

At the time, in the early 1950's, the State Department in Washington was staffed largely by the Civil Service. Foreign Service officers rarely served in Washington. As I recall, the legal requirement was that FSO's serve at least 3 out of 15 years in Washington.

Q: Many of these people had been flooded into the Marshall Plan too.

MILLER: Yes.

Q: Realizing that junior officers often are oblivious of the problems of the more senior officers, did you get any feeling of the problems the more senior officers faced during the McCarthy period?

MILLER: McCarthyism had some impact. I came in toward the end of the Truman administration, while Acheson was still Secretary of State. In January 1953 Eisenhower was inaugurated and John Foster Dulles came in as Secretary of State. Aside from Dulles' call for “positive loyalty” from Department employees in his initial address to them when he took office, the Bureaus of Security and Consular Affairs were joined. This was an indication that the new Administration was going to pay much more attention to weeding out undesirables in terms of allowing immigrants into the country or giving temporary visas

to people. It was going to pay a lot more attention to security considerations. It was an atmosphere that created a lot of apprehension, although I have to say that in terms of individuals in the State Department—their own security clearance being questioned—I wasn't aware of that. What was much more troublesome to me personally as a junior officer, was the huge reduction-in-force I referred to earlier.

Q: Called a RIF.

MILLER: Yes. Even though I was on one of the few permanent registers—if not the only one—from which junior officers could get permanent tenure in the Civil Service, I eventually got a RIF notice (even though I had been assured that would not happen). Most junior officers in the Civil Service were much more vulnerable than I because they could not get tenure. But the RIF was so widespread, particularly among junior officers, that I eventually got a RIF notice. I was lucky, my boss appealed the case, less because I was indispensable but more because the person who was being bumped into my job, he felt, was even less qualified than I was. I thus overcame the RIF and stayed in that office. But it was the Reduction In Force that made us much more nervous as junior officers than the security atmosphere. Had I finished the intern program and landed a job in a less central office, I could very well have ended up in, say, the Office of Educational Exchange in the Bureau of Cultural Affairs. A number of my intern colleagues did end up there, and were later transferred with that office to USIA. So, part of early career planning is wise decisions, part is pure luck.

Q: What was behind the Reduction In Force? What was the politics of this?

MILLER: The Republicans came into office in 1953 for the first time in twenty years. Their political argument was that the government bureaucracy had become bloated under the “big spenders” of the Democratic Party and they were going to try to trim it back to a Republican size. They also were convinced that the non-partisan Civil Service and Foreign Service were actually loyal to the Democrats.

I think, as a matter of fact, the Reduction In Force simply shifted people around and created a lot of uncertainty and disruption more than streamlining the government payroll. I don't know whether the government was actually trimmed back or not. But certainly junior officers who had very little seniority were much more vulnerable to be bumped out by people who had over the years risen up to fairly junior professional grades and simply had more seniority due to the length of time they had spent in government service. In any case, my reduction-in-force experience, only a year and a half into my career, was highly unsettling, demonstrating that a supposedly secure government job held in fact many uncertainties. And this RIF was not the last of those uncertainties.

Q: You then moved over to Paris still in NATO affairs.

MILLER: That's right. I went on a Foreign Service Reserve appointment to the US Delegation to NATO, which in those days was still in Paris, and was low man on the totem pole—3rd Secretary— in the political section there.

Q: This was from 1954 to 1957.

MILLER: Yes. And it was while I was there in that Delegation that I was “Wristonized”, the next career uncertainty I—and many colleagues—faced.

Q: Wristonized being the program...

MILLER: Henry Wriston, a former president of Brown University, had been asked by President Eisenhower to study the State Department—the first of a number of such studies after the war— to ensure that its organization and personnel systems were adequate to the immense challenges of the post-war world and the unprecedented position of leadership in which the United States found itself. Among other things, the Wriston Committee found that Foreign Service officers' long service abroad caused them to lose touch with the country they represented, while the civil servants in the Department were making policy analyses and recommendations without having any contact with foreign

governments and societies. Wriston thus found that both services were working in their respective vacuums. He therefore recommended their amalgamation into one Foreign Service in which officers would be required to serve both at home and abroad.

As you might imagine, the recommendation, which was accepted by the Administration, caused great uncertainty and dislocation for both the Foreign Service and the Civil Service—in my own case, the third time in the first five years of my career. Foreign Service officers, who regarded themselves as members of an elite service selected by a rigorous examination process, resented opening the floodgates to the “hoi polloi” of the Civil Service. Many civil servants, who by personal choice or family situation preferred working in Washington, faced the major disruption of overseas service if they wanted to continue their careers with the State Department.

Q: What were the issues facing NATO at the time you were there?

MILLER: Well, two big issues were hot in NATO while I was in Paris. One was how West Germany was going to be integrated. When I arrived in Paris in the summer of 1954, the French National Assembly had just turned down the European Defense Community concept. That was the point at which John Foster Dulles threatened an agonizing reappraisal of all of our policy. But very quickly the idea was developed, and I don't recall whether it was a French idea, German or British idea or our own, but it was one that we accepted very quickly, which was to bring West Germany actually into NATO as a full member under certain safeguards: that it would not have nuclear weapons, it would not have the so-called ABC weapons—atomic, biological or chemical weapons, and that it would have a force ceiling of twelve divisions or something like that. But that was the one big issue— how to get West Germany integrated into the NATO structure. After the fall of the EDC idea everybody rapidly coalesced around the idea of actually bringing Germany in as a member of NATO.

The other big issue, and that was the issue I was working on, was the NATO annual review of defense programs. Every NATO member was questioned by its peers on why it couldn't do more in terms of contributing forces to the NATO military structure—the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE).

It was the buildup of NATO forces and the integration of Germany into NATO that were the two big issues of NATO at the time.

Q: Again from your point of view, were there any countries that seemed to be quite delinquent or very difficult to deal with from the American delegation point of view?

MILLER: France was always difficult to deal with. It was winding down its war in Indochina and getting deeply involved in the Algerian conflict. So it had a lot of problems which created issues within NATO, both with respect to its force contribution and kind of strings it was insisting on with respect to force contributions. For example, it was demanding that we provide it military and economic assistance in Indochina as a price for its cooperation and force buildup in NATO. It also was very prickly on the subject of the use of French territory by foreign (US) forces. NATO Headquarters, both military and civilian, were on French territory at the time. But also the logistics lines of communications and oil pipelines were being built across French territory. France was insisting on much more unilateral control over those multilateral structures than most of the rest of us felt they should have in a multilateral alliance. So, I think France was probably the most difficult.

The others were the poorer countries in the southern tier like Portugal, Greece and Turkey in terms of trying to get them to build up their forces. Basically they were saying, we have the manpower but we don't have the money. If you give us more aid we can build up more forces. And of course the conflicts between Greece and Turkey were always a constant headache for NATO.

Q: Again, we are talking now in the spring of 1990 where there has been a dramatic change in the balance of our structure, particularly in Europe, but how did you and those around you view the "Soviet menace" at the time?

MILLER: In light of all the events in the late '40s after the end of the war—the Berlin Airlift, the communist coup in Czechoslovakia, the Greek civil war and Stalin's general attitude towards the West—I don't think there was much doubt in anybody's mind that the Soviet Union was a threat. Because it had maintained its forces in Eastern Europe the thought that it could attack West Germany and run all the way to the North Sea with its forces was not an unreasonable appraisal of Soviet capabilities at the time. In other words, if the West didn't rebuild economically, industrially and militarily the powerful Soviet forces could indeed put pressure on the West in ways which would cause them to collapse. Also, in both France and Italy there were very strong communist parties which threatened the internal political stability of two very important countries in NATO. So the belief in the reality of the Soviet threat was very strong. I think it was probably pretty widely held throughout all the NATO countries. Each NATO country had its own political problems and it had to deal with them in its own way. But as a generality I think the belief that Soviet forces were a threat to the West was pretty widely held throughout the alliance, which made it possible to build up these forces.

Q: You left Paris in 1957 and came back to...

MILLER: Yes, I came back as a junior officer in the Executive Secretariat.

Q: You were there from '57 to '60.

MILLER: That's right.

Q: That is a very long period in a pressure cooker type of job.

MILLER:It was.

Q: What was your job and what was the Secretariat doing in this period? This is the end of the Eisenhower period.

MILLER: That is right. I left the Secretariat in June 1960 so it was still the Eisenhower period. I would describe the Executive Secretariat, and I would suspect that it is still true today, as the bureaucracy's bureaucracy. It was set up, in the early post-war era to support the Office of the Secretary and the Under Secretary of State and the other Under Secretaries—the Seventh Floor so-called. We made sure that staff studies going to the Secretary or his Deputy for decision were properly staffed, had the proper clearances, were clearly stated, etc. We also oversaw the preparation of briefing books for, as it turned out, Presidential trips as well as for trips of the Secretary, or for meetings in Washington of the Secretary or the President with foreign VIPs. So it was a very high pressure and busy office.

This was before the creation of the Operations Center. One of our “hazardous duties” was to serve as the Departmental Duty Officer on a rotational basis. We junior officers every 7 or 8 weeks drew the Departmental Duty on weekends and at night. I can remember, for example, I was Department duty officer the day Dulles died. It was on a Sunday and I went in expecting just to read the telegrams and go home and be on call for the rest of the day. Shortly before 9 a.m. I got a phone call from Martin Agronsky of CBS wanting me to confirm that Dulles was dead. I had no idea of that and said I couldn't confirm. He got irritated and hung up because he was going on the air in two minutes. Then about 5 minutes later Under Secretary Douglas Dillon called me, he was number two in the Department at the time. Herter had become Secretary of State and was in Geneva at a Four Power conference on Berlin. Dillon confirmed to me that Dulles had indeed died and that we had to make arrangements to get Herter back for the funeral, etc. It was a very busy day. That was before the creation of the Operation Center and we all very often acted like one-armed paper hangers on these duty days.

Q: As a training job it is probably the best one can think of isn't it?

MILLER: A fantastic training job for a young officer. I went on some fascinating trips because it was during the period when Eisenhower decided to travel. I went on his trip to India and some ten other countries between here and India. I went on one Eisenhower trip to Western Europe and I was at the famous U-2 summit where Eisenhower and the Western leaders came but Khrushchev refused to meet Eisenhower because Eisenhower would not apologize for sending U-2 spy planes over the Soviet Union. So there was a lot of very interesting and high-powered travel at the time. However, after three years I felt that I had had enough of criticizing other people's staff papers coming up to the Secretary and I wanted to make my own mistakes in a little corner of substance on my own. So I was delighted to be selected as Belgium-Luxembourg Desk Officer right after the U-2 summit.

Q: What was your impression of the Eisenhower/Dulles/Herter State Department? Did it seem to be running well—things moving up? Or were there little dukedoms off to the side?

MILLER: Well, I was pretty young and inexperienced at the time. I would say that Dulles, as an individual was pretty formidable for a young officer to be around. On the other hand, I don't recall ever hearing him raise his voice at anybody. He was very cerebral, he looked formidable and he didn't have much small talk, but as I say he was a decent person to work for as a junior officer. Basically he was saying “do this” and “do that” and we were saluting and doing it without much dialogue at our level. My impression of his relationships with his Assistant Secretaries was that he used them. I don't recall having the impression that the Secretary of State was cut off from the rest of the Department or isolated by a small coterie of trusted assistants brought in from outside, the way you hear the State Department is being run today—or the way it tended to be run in the Kissinger period.

Q: This is one of the things that the Dulles Secretaryship does seem to be—at least a well managed one. Ideas could move up and down.

MILLER: Yes, that is my recollection. He had special assistants, both career and political, who tapped into the Department very well. Of course, the Department was a smaller, simpler organization, not nearly as complex as it is today. It didn't have all of these functional bureaus like it does today—like the Bureau of Narcotics or the Bureau of Terrorism or the Bureau of Refugees. It was much easier to manage and coordinate than it is today.

Q: Perhaps another thing too was that everybody was coming out of a wartime experience where you learned to work within an organization and things flowed up and down.

MILLER: Europe was still the center, other than possibly Japan. And, of course, the fall of China to communism was a big issue, as was the Suez crisis in the Middle East. But nevertheless the attention span of the Department and the Secretary of State was not as dispersed as it is today. The colonial world was becoming independent at that time, but the concept of a third world—even the term “third world” hadn't been invented yet. We were dealing with colonial issues essentially through the European metropoles either because they were still running those countries or they had just put down their responsibilities and we hadn't yet developed the habit or need to deal with all these countries individually. A lot of them weren't even in the UN. So the world was an easier place to deal with and the State Department was easier, therefore, to manage and to run than it is today.

Q: Did you get an impression in the Secretariat that there was nothing more selective and arrogant than a young officer in a staff position?

MILLER: It is true that young officers sometime succumbed to the temptation of thinking not only were they working for the Secretary of State, but maybe they were the Secretary of State. You had to guard against that because your responsibility was to get the cooperation of the bureaus or the Assistant Secretaries to make a better product to go to the Secretary. We were criticized. We did irritate people just because of the pressure under which we worked. Sometimes the people who were producing these policy studies

felt that we were nitpicking their staff studies to death while they needed to get important matters decided by the Secretary. This was a matter of judgment: sometimes we would get pulled back by our supervisors who would get irate calls from the Assistant Secretary saying we have to get that paper through. Maybe all the i's aren't dotted and t's aren't crossed, but it is more important to get the decision than to make sure it is a perfect product. On the other hand we did serve the function of ensuring that Assistant Secretary A wasn't trying to slip something over on Assistant Secretary B by insisting that something go up improperly cleared. So we did serve an important bureaucratic function. The fact that the Secretariat survives until this day shows that it may be a headache for the bureaucracy, but it may be a necessary headache.

Q: What about the weight of the various geographic bureaus? Did you have a feeling that there was a pecking order there?

MILLER: Yes. Off the top of my head I would say that during the Dulles era and partly because of the shape of the world but also the press of events, the European Bureau was at the top of the heap. Probably the Far Eastern Bureau, as it was called then, was number two. Number three would be Near East and South Asia, and number four was Latin America. That would be my impression. That was the pecking order. The African Bureau didn't exist, it was covered, to the extent that it was not covered by the European Bureau where the colonial powers existed, by the Near Eastern and South Asian Bureau. I can't recall if the African Bureau was created at the end of the Eisenhower Administration or the beginning of the Kennedy Administration.

Q: Probably...Mennen Williams...

MILLER: There had been an Assistant Secretary before Mennen Williams—Joseph Satterthwaite, I believe.

Q: The decolonization process started about what...'57, '58 in Ghana and a few other places?

MILLER: Yes, that is right. So the African bureau may have been created while Herter was Secretary. I don't think it was created while Dulles was Secretary.

Q: You had the Belgium-Luxembourg Desk. You inherited it at a very interesting time...

MILLER: I learned more about the Congo (Zaire today) than I did about Belgium and Luxembourg.

Q: I was going to say that normally this assignment is not the most exciting place in the world. But probably the one time it was really on the forefront of everything was when you were there.

MILLER: I joined the desk two weeks after the Congo became independent and almost immediately exploded into revolt and instability. However, I was delighted to accept the job on the Belgian desk not knowing that it was going to be such a busy and active place. In those days, young officers felt that a desk officer job was the basic line job that you needed to have to advance your career. So I was delighted to get a job in the Office of Western European Affairs which was, let's say, the most prestigious office in the most prestigious bureau. Even though Belgium and Luxembourg were not the most important offices...

Q: ...at the time. But it probably was the best you could hope for given your rank.

MILLER: That's right.

Q: You weren't going to get the French Desk.

MILLER: Yes, that's right. I was happy with it. Really most of the time I was on that desk was Congo crisis. We dealt more with the Congo than we did with Belgium and Luxembourg.

Q: Could you describe the situation as you saw it at that time?

MILLER: Belgium had been pressed by the developing instability in the Congo to give the country independence almost with no notice. In effect it announced to the world and the Congolese that it was giving the Congo independence in six months' time. Belgium, a small country, didn't feel it could withstand either the pressures of the growing insurrection and instability in the Congo, or the pressures from the United States and the United Nations to bring the Congo to independence in a more stable and organized way. So basically, it just threw up its hands and said, “all right, we give you independence”. Patrice Lumumba took power as the radical nationalist, charismatic leader at the time. The Belgians and the West generally were concerned that he would open the way for a Soviet takeover of the Congo. This would have brought the Soviet Union into the heart of Africa, which we were determined to prevent almost at all costs. I don't know if we were prepared to send troops, but we immediately got the UN involved. The process of trying to prevent the Soviet Union, in league with radical African nationalist, newly independent, leaders, like Nkrumah in Ghana, made this a real international crisis. And, of course, we were still in the depths of the cold war. The U-2 summit, where Khrushchev refused to meet with Eisenhower, had taken place in May 1960. The Congo became independent in June 1960. For the next two or three years it was a major international crisis. We were trying to work through the UN to prevent a major US-Soviet confrontation in the heart of Africa. It turned out to be, I think, one of the more successful operations of the United Nations because neither the Soviets nor ourselves wanted to confront each other militarily in that part of the world. With our pressure on the Belgians to pull out their troops and our efforts to keep the Congo from being pulled apart. The Katanga, now called Shaba Province, where all the riches were, threatened to become an independent nation and to deprive the central

government of all of the resources and tax revenues, etc. from the great mines of the Katanga. In the end, the Congo miraculously was held together. The superpowers did not confront each other there and under the UN an international force was sent in and was able to bring about the creation of a fairly stable central government.

General Mobutu, who was then Colonel Mobutu, probably has outlived his usefulness today, but at the time he was the great stabilizing force in the Congo and the one around whom everyone was able to rally in order to prevent the Congo from being radicalized.

Q: You are looking at this through the prism of our embassy in Brussels. How was our embassy responding as this moved along? Particularly in this period there was a tendency of our embassies to identify...they had NATO on their minds and all this...with the ex-colonial power.

MILLER: Our responsibility on the Belgian Desk in the European Bureau was to maintain our relations with Belgium on an even keel and to look out for our NATO interests. It was true, therefore, that our recommendations and our dealings within the bureaucracy on this subject tended to reflect NATO concerns and the concerns of our bilateral relations with Belgium. Therefore, we were in frequent confrontation with the UN and African Bureaus. The Secretary and the President had to decide where the ultimate US interests lay among these different viewpoints.

Looking back on it with some thirty years hindsight, I think the policy we followed, even though at the time we felt it was bruising little Belgium and might be jeopardizing some of our NATO interests, turned out to be the correct policy: we put a lot of pressure on Belgium, since it had decided to give the country independence and to relinquish its hold both militarily and to some extent economically and certainly politically. At the same time, we put pressure on the Soviets not to get involved. And thirdly, we sought to use the UN, compromising some of our own national interests, to take hold in the area. I think it was an example of a very successful peace-keeping operation which preserved both Soviet and

Western interests as well as bringing a very unstable, sprawling country independence and giving it a relatively stable government. In all respects, I think it was very successful at the time.

Q: How did you operate as a desk officer in this clash of titans, you might say, between competing interests, etc.?

MILLER: Well, you know the desk officer is pretty junior. I was attending a lot of meetings, taking a lot of notes and accompanying people up to see the Secretary—the Belgian Ambassador who was either being called in or who came in with a complaint—I was basically a note taker and a cable writer. I did a lot of writing of instructions. But basically what I did was to keep my bosses informed so that if they felt that things were going the wrong way in terms of our interests in Western Europe and NATO they could carry it to higher levels. So, it was attending meetings; expressing views that I had cleared with my supervisors; alerting my supervisors to problems arising that they might want to take up and come to a more satisfactory compromise than I was able to do at my level; being note taker in meetings of senior people, either Belgians or UN people who were coming in to see high level people in the Department on the subject of the Congo and particularly the Belgian aspects thereof. It was a very busy time—but I was not a policy maker.

Q: In a way it is a wonderful position. You learn how things work but you are not having to lay it on the line. What was your impression of how our embassy in Belgium understood and served the cause of what we were trying to do?

MILLER: I think it did what it was supposed to do. Like the Belgian Desk in Washington it was responsible to maintain good relations with the Belgians. The first ambassador who was there when I was on the desk was William Burden, a Republican political appointee, who was fearless in terms of promoting what he felt was US-Belgian interests. He was a very strong personality. He was followed by a very strong career personality— Douglas

MacArthur II. Both of them, I think, had a good understanding of overall US interests and therefore they were not trying to prevent....

Q: They were not coopted, as sometimes happens, by seeing things so much from the Belgian perspective that they lost...?

MILLER: I would certainly not say that. I would say that they were pointing out possible consequences for US-Belgian relations or for NATO solidarity, because NATO was also made up of other colonial powers who were concerned about Western interests being overridden in the Congo. Sometimes they felt that the US was so concerned about Soviet incursions into Central Africa that we were threatening NATO solidarity. But, no, I think the two ambassadors to Belgium while I was on the desk were balanced in their approach. They didn't always win their arguments, but I do not think they were co-opted.

Q: What about another major figure in this—I am trying to get this from your perspective, of course—Mennen Williams who seemed to have become absolutely enamored, if not tunnel vision on Africa as such and often lost sight of our American interests. Did you have any feel of this?

MILLER: Mennen Williams was Africa-oriented. There is no question about that. That, of course, was his job. On the other hand, if my memory serves me, when Mennen Williams became Assistant Secretary at the beginning of the Kennedy Administration, there was a crisis, namely the assassination of Lumumba, which forced the pace of the new Administration's decision process on the Congo. The Soviets and the radical nationalist leaders of Africa were absolutely furious and were sure that this was done as a Belgian-American or NATO plot. Therefore, Adlai Stevenson at the UN was forced to take a much more radical anti-Belgian, anti-Western position in order, in his judgment, to preserve the basis of UN involvement and what he considered to be the basic US interests.

So, at the beginning of the Kennedy Administration, I think, this one event forced our policy to move faster than let's say we Western European types felt it should. We felt that that

would jeopardize even more our relations with Belgium, NATO solidarity, etc., etc. But I think, again with the benefit of hindsight, that probably we were forced into that situation by events and not just because of the tunnel vision of one G. Mennen Williams. He was kind of a missionary on African matters, but my recollection is not that he was such a missionary that he really caused US policy in the Congo to be distorted and to undermine our basic interests in Western Europe and in NATO.

Q: Again it might not have affected your perspective, but did you have any feeling that there were some new, young, hot-shot characters running around causing grief to policy makers?

MILLER: No, I did not personally have any sense of that. It is my recollection that William Tyler was Assistant Secretary for European Affairs. He was pretty staid. Harlan Cleveland was Assistant Secretary for International Organizations Affairs and although a liberal thinker he was not wild and certainly wasn't a young whiz kid. He was a man of mature years.

No, I guess my feeling was that the fanatics in this whole thing were not so much Mennen Williams, but career people on the Congo Desk like Sheldon Vance and Bob Eisenberg. They were the real fanatics in the affair. Joe Sisco, who was then the Office Director in UN Political Affairs, and Bill Cargo, his deputy, were hard driving and very tough in the bureaucratic fights of the day and very effective. Everyone concerned was under great pressure, but we in the European bureau felt that Sisco and Cargo were fair and straightforward in fulfilling their responsibilities. We didn't always feel that way about Vance and Eisenberg.

Q: Was there anything dealing with Luxembourg that caused much of a problem?

MILLER: Not that I can think of. I had one nice trip to Belgium and Luxembourg and that is the only time I have ever been in Luxembourg. We may have had a visit from a member of the royal family, but I can't recall any problems.

Q: You then go from one place where you are very much involved to another place which certainly was gaining more and more attention. You went to Saigon from 1962 to 1965. What were you doing there?

MILLER: I was the deputy chief of the political section. It was a huge political section at that time—I think it had 16 or 17 people. I was newly promoted to the old FSO-3, the First Secretary level, and was helping the political counselor manage the work of the section.

Q: What was the situation at the time you arrived in 1962 as you saw it?

MILLER: The guerrilla war, in terms of terrorist incidents, was heating up. This was about a year and a half into the Kennedy Administration. By the time I got there the US Military Advisory Group had been transformed into MACV, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, and the Advisory contingent had already grown to about 10,000 US military personnel who were advising the Vietnamese armed forces, sometimes under combat conditions, but were not participating in combat. Fritz Nolting was still Ambassador there when I arrived. I had known Fritz as well as Bill Trueheart, the DCM, at NATO in Paris, as I had Mel Manfull, the political counselor.

We were still trying to encourage Diem to broaden his political base in order to compete politically with the Viet Cong internally in South Vietnam. We had little, if any, success in encouraging Diem to do that. But that was the situation. It was a growing guerrilla war. We were also puzzled as to how to give growing support to the South Vietnamese government without breaching the Geneva Accords even though we didn't like the Geneva Accords—at least John Foster Dulles didn't like them when they were signed in 1954. We were still trying to find ways to abide by their strict limitations in terms of our

military assistance and support. We were trying to get Diem to broaden the base of his government. Nobody foresaw the problems that came up in the spring and summer of 1963, namely the Buddhist revolt which ultimately burgeoned into a situation which caused the Kennedy Administration to withdraw its support from the Diem government—leading to his overthrow and assassination.

Q: What were the feelings among the officers there in the political section?

MILLER: Most of us felt that we were engaged in an important and constructive effort —and that it was possible to achieve our objective, which was to preserve the right of South Vietnam to determine its own future. And most of us believed that the Diem government was worthy of our support even though it was to say the least, flawed. Most of us believed that (Communist) North Vietnam was committing aggression against South Vietnam and that this was part of Moscow's and Beijing's effort to extend their domination, weaken the “free world” position wherever the opportunity arose. South Vietnam was one such opportunity. When the Buddhist revolt came in May of 1963 and began to grow into something that got out of control, then there were a lot of different views within the mission. There were those who felt we ought to go all the way with Diem. There were those who underestimated what the Buddhist revolt was going to build into. There were those who felt that Diem was not able to cope and the issue became one of should we stay in South Vietnam and help somebody who was not able to help himself or should we not continue our effort there. Of course, the decision was to brush Diem aside and try to continue because the general judgment in Washington was that the stake we had in preventing the communist takeover in South Vietnam was great—almost greater for us than it was for the South Vietnamese. I think that was the beginning of the controversial aspect of our effort in Vietnam. I mean it was controversial in the press already and domestically it was somewhat controversial, but I think that within the US Government it began to get controversial after the decision was made to pull the rug out from under Diem.

Q: Here you were in the political section looking at Southeast Asia. How did you see the threat to the United States of Diem going and the North Vietnamese winning?

MILLER: I think we were all taken with the domino theory argument—that all of Southeast Asia, with the exception of Thailand, was newly independent and that a number of Southeast Asian countries had already had their bout with communist insurgencies —the Philippines, Malaysia and of course while we were there Indonesia was having an increasing problem with internal communists—not necessarily with insurgency, but nonetheless a threat of a growing communist party. I think the way it looked to us as a government, and to most people in the mission in Saigon—there were exceptions, there were critics—was that if South Vietnam went, other countries of Southeast Asia could go as well. Therefore, since no other country besides the United States could help South Vietnam prevent this from happening, this was our job to do. This may seem in 1990 to be a mistaken way of looking at the situation, but I think that was the way most people looked at it at the time—including most people in Congress, and including many of those who became opponents of the effort.

Q: Things could have happened quite differently had we pulled out at that time. This was not just a made up theory.

MILLER: Well, you know, nobody can rewrite history, but there was a coup attempt in Indonesia in 1965 which failed by a hair. I think what is going on in Cambodia today is a continuation of the historic pressure by Vietnam, communist or non- communist, to dominate its weaker neighbors to its west, which in the long term could put pressure on Thailand. If the great Soviet empire indeed collapsed in 1990, I think we will have a different perspective on that problem than we had in 1962 and '63 or even 1965 or '67 and '68. One of the things that sort of boggles one's mind today is that, if you read the record, one of the reasons the decision was taken in the Kennedy Administration to pull the rug out from under Diem in addition to his apparent inability to deal with his Buddhist crisis, was information that his brother Nhu was putting out feelers with Hanoi. We were

convinced that this was not in the US interest. That was an added factor in the decision to pull the rug out from under Diem. How dare they negotiate a compromise of some kind with Hanoi! Today that seems almost unbelievable.

Q: When you arrived at the embassy in the political section you were obviously going out and collecting information, how well did you find yourself in communication and being helped by our American military there and the CIA?

MILLER: We had in the embassy a small group of so-called provincial reporters who were Vietnamese language officers—a group of 4 or 5 young officers—who were traveling all over the provinces. They were greatly aided by all of the other elements of the mission—the military, the CIA, AID, the USIS people—no question about it. My impression is that we were greatly helped by the military and I hope that the military felt we helped them in terms of giving them political insights into what was going on. We sometimes had different perceptions. I think we in the political section always felt the military over-assessed progress and the military felt that we were always too pessimistic and undermining their effort by suggesting that maybe progress was not as great as they thought. And of course this was one of the terribly difficult things. We developed all these statistical ways of measuring progress, like evaluation systems which were program- directed. You know, the number of fence posts installed, number of privies built or the number of hamlets put behind fences, etc. But none of those statistics captured what really was going on, which was the ability of the VC to come in at night and intimate the peasants behind the fences by lobbing a grenade over the fence, etc. We never really, in our good old American way, were able to capture what the real problems of the insurgency were: which were 1) intimidation by the Viet Cong; 2) a lack of conviction on the part of the non-communist Vietnamese that our side was going to win and 3) that basically the US had replaced the French as, if not a colonial power, a sort of neo-colonial power—something we never understood or wanted to believe.

Q: How were you seeing the Buddhist revolt?

MILLER: The feeling in the political section was that the situation was getting out of control. On the other hand, there was also a feeling that it was a mistake to withdraw our support from Diem. There was some feeling that if we felt that we couldn't achieve our policy objective with Diem maybe we should liquidate our involvement there. But that from a political standpoint at home didn't seem to be possible. I think that Kennedy probably felt that after the Bay of Pigs fiasco he didn't also want the criticism that he had pulled out of Vietnam which was under such communist threat. In other words, we were sort of caught up in a no-win situation. But it seemed to us that Diem just didn't understand how serious problems were internally in the country because he and his brother acted in a repressive way rather than in a way to try and solve the problems. We were kind of stuck with doing things their way or deciding to get somebody else. And of course that was a disastrous decision.

Q: As far as the political section worked—Diem-US relations, I assume, was carried on by the US ambassador. Did you have much contact with the rest of the Vietnamese government at various levels?

MILLER: We worked under very great restrictions during the Diem era, because he did not want us to see any opposition figures, he only wanted us to see those who supported him. So we had a lot of contacts at the working level, at the National Assembly and in the government. And we knew a few tame dissidents, people who had spent some time in jail, etc. I suppose the CIA had contacts with the latter as well. I can remember, for example, when there were National Assembly elections in September of 1963, Diem promised Fritz Nolting that he was going to broaden the base of the government and allow more people to run for the Assembly. All the information we were picking up from our contacts showed that it was going to be the same old National Assembly. I remember doing a wrap up report on the preparations for the elections which basically said that there wasn't going to be any more broadening, the same old candidates were appearing and if opposition candidates were allowed to run they certainly wouldn't win. I can remember that Fritz

called me up to his office and went over that report with me very carefully because it was so different from what he had been told by Diem. I went over the material with him and he let the report go out, but he kind of shook his head.

Q: What was your impression of Ambassador Nolting—how he dealt both with the embassy and with the situation?

MILLER: He was a fine human being. He had no background in Southeast Asia—like a lot of us. He, I think, was convinced that we had to back Diem. Those had been his instructions. We would make a mistake if we didn't. He was very bitter about his experience there and how he was replaced by Lodge. I guess my basic feeling is, and I think in his book he says this too, he should never have gone on home leave in the summer of '63. In other words, he felt this Buddhist revolt was a flash in the pan and he could leave the embassy with Bill Trueheart in charge and, of course, that ruined their personal relationship. I think that Fritz had an impossible job and he probably wasn't flexible enough in seeing what was really happening in South Vietnam. I suppose the Kennedy Administration decided they wanted somebody with a high profile and political moxie and also a Republican to sort of give a bipartisan sheen to the policy and the problem out there and they sent in Henry Cabot Lodge. Anyway, I liked Fritz very much as a human being, but I think he may have made some misjudgments.

Q: What was the difference between Nolting and Trueheart?

MILLER: When Fritz came back after home leave to say goodbye, he was there for a matter of two or three weeks. He felt that our increasingly pessimistic reporting in his absence had misled Washington to deciding to pull the rug out from under Diem—that we had misled Washington about Diem's ability to govern the country. I think Bill Trueheart was convinced, and most of us in the political section were convinced, that Diem was so isolated from reality that he was not really aware of how bad things were getting in terms of his ability to govern. On the other hand, he was allowing his brother, Nhu, to use actions

which were increasingly alienating not just the rank and file of the population, but also members of his own government. The sons and daughters of government bureaucrats and military officers were being rounded up and beaten, etc. because these protest demonstrations were spreading. But Fritz felt that somehow our reporting should have been—the glass should have been half full rather than half empty. My own feeling was that the embassy was reporting things as they saw it—that Diem had lost control.

Q: Getting sort of into the internal workings of the embassy— did you feel at the time Nolting left that you had been under a certain amount of—the lid had been on and now we can report, or had the situation changed so much that it was a natural evolution?

MILLER: When Lodge came, he was under instructions to determine whether or not we could solve the situation with Diem and if not to encourage the generals around Diem to understand that we were prepared to see a change. Because everybody then understood we were contemplating a change, a lot of different assessments began to appear. General Harkins, who was commanding MACV at the time, was reporting that the war was being won, etc. The embassy was reporting growing unrest and opposition to the Diem government and the body politic. That became the issue for the Kennedy Administration. Which of these reports is correct? The thrust of Lodge's instructions were if we have to do it we are prepared to dump Diem. Therefore, there wasn't the lid on reporting the growing unrest of the political situation. Nevertheless the decision to dump Diem was a very controversial decision even within the political section. There were people who felt that if you did this you didn't know what you were getting in for. There was nobody who had the strength of leadership that Diem did. And even though he may not be doing so well, we would make a great mistake to dump him. Where the truth lies is still very difficult to say. Certainly after Diem went things deteriorated.

Q: What was your impression of Harkins? One gets in reading books and all that Harkins was way over his head in a very complicated situation. From your feeling at the time, did he understand the type of war?

MILLER: My feeling is that neither Harkins nor Westmoreland understood the kind of problem that the US military faced in South Vietnam. My basic bias after all these years is that one of the biggest mistakes we made was to take the war away from the South Vietnamese. They became a subordinate command in their own war and therefore we took away their stake in their own survival. The next question is, “Was it possible to save South Vietnam in any case?”, and I don't know the answer to that. On the other hand, I think in a sense everything we did, and I think both Harkins and Westmoreland, and maybe all of us, contributed to reducing the stake of the South Vietnamese in their own survival as a non-communist entity. On the other hand, if you look at Southeast Asia today, we achieved our larger objective—that of preventing the other dominoes from falling.

Q: What was your impression when Lodge came? How did you and the political section feel about the arrival of Lodge?

MILLER: It was kind of exciting because he was a national personality. Lodge was a highly political animal. I don't think that he was really interested in objective analysis of the situation. He came convinced that we had to get rid of Diem and I am not sure that he thought very much about the consequences. And, of course, he didn't stay around long enough to live with the consequences. He went back to run for President in 1964. He came back at a later time. As I say he was a highly political animal, not analytical in the least, and not cerebral. I suppose he was looking at these things always more in terms of Henry Cabot Lodge and his role in history.

Q: I assume from time to time you would go up and brief Lodge. Did you find him listening, but feel that you were not making a tremendous amount of connection about the nuances of the situation?

MILLER: We would go up and brief him and very often end up listening to him more than briefing him. I had a lot of contact with him, but I don't think I know how to answer that question. I think that he had his mind made up by other sources of information because he

came out with two or three people who were his eyes and ears and I am not sure he really listened to the political section very much. He knew what he thought he had to do to carry out his instructions and what was important to him was Henry Cabot Lodge. The reporting did go out. He fired one DCM for thinking that he could run the mission except for those issues he had to take to the ambassador. Lodge didn't like that.

Q: Who was that?

MILLER: David Nes.

But I think he had his own agenda. We didn't feel constrained by that necessarily, but on the other hand neither did I feel that I or my colleagues had great impact on his thinking.

Q: How did the events of October 1963 impact on you?

MILLER: I was generally aware that there was a coup coming. I was given one specific task to do which I guess made me aware of that. It had been determined at some point that we should have contact with Diem's Vice President, Nguyen Ngoc Tho, to express the hope that, if change was coming, it would be in accordance with the constitution. I went over and delivered the message. He, I think, got the message and responded very little. Of course, what happened was that he was swept out when the generals took over. The day of the coup, October 31, I became aware of firing when I was home for lunch. I hopped into my little Volkswagen and went down to the embassy and saw that there was concertina wire spread around at various parts of the city. I had no trouble getting to the embassy, but then it was confirmed that a coup was going on. Basically we were just there to observe, take reports and do what reporting we could. We spent the night there. I can remember being concerned about my family and trying to get through on the phone. I got a constant busy signal all night because my wife had talked to somebody during these proceedings and the phone had not gotten back on the stand correctly. Anyway we watched the final stages of the coup and the attack on the Palace from the roof of the embassy all night long. Once in a while we heard a zing which would cause us all to

duck down behind the parapet of the roof. There was a great feeling the next morning of euphoria when it was all over and some feeling of remorse when the news came through that Diem and Nhu had been assassinated. I don't think that anybody, at least on our side, intended that. I gather that Kennedy, himself, was rather shocked at that news.

Q: Did you have problems keeping up with who was in power? I mean, the generals came in very quickly and the situation turned in to what has been described as a revolving door. How were you operating in this very difficult situation?

MILLER:Once the coup took place and the generals came in, everyone was hopeful that the problems that led to the coup, namely the growing unrest and instability in the body politic, would finish and everybody would pull together and get back to fighting the war. Of course that didn't happen. The generals began squabbling among themselves. One of the generals who had been left out of the coup group, General Khanh was pouting and he managed to overthrow the first coup group. He was a disaster. Meanwhile the progress of the war began to deteriorate with the VC gaining ever greater control over the countryside until Thieu and Ky. By then we had long since sent in our own combat troops and had taken over the war for good.

Q: You were there until '65 so you were there during a great deal of the revolving door. Did the reporting sort of move over to the military side?

MILLER: We constantly tried to encourage whoever was in power, usually a general, to get some kind of constitutional base and some kind broadened political base. There were two or three hopeful experiments in that direction, but they didn't last. At this point I would have to delve into the record to be accurate as to why they didn't last, but basically they didn't last I suppose because the South Vietnamese had no experience in a democratic form of government and we kept hoping they could somehow build on it under the pressure of the war. And of course it turned out not to be possible. Then there were all these rivalries among the military. One group would get tired of not being in power and felt it could do

better and would toss out those in power and then eventually they would become the target of a third group. Until the thing sort of settled down first with Ky, and then Thieu outmaneuvered Ky and Ky became vice president. Then it settled down for a long time, but by then our own body politic began to get impatient with the problem.

Q: How about within the political section? What was your attitude as you saw this thing happening?

MILLER: I think we all got very frustrated at the games the Vietnamese were playing among themselves. Good, bright eyed, bushy-tailed Americans couldn't understand why the Vietnamese would play all these games with each other instead of fighting the war and achieving the common objective of keeping South Vietnam free from a communist takeover. My considered judgment is that we provided the South Vietnamese with the wherewithal to indulge in the luxury of these kinds of games because basically they knew that if it was going to be won it was going to be won by us. That in the end turned out not to be the case. We finally got tired of it ourselves. But I think the atmosphere in the political section was 1) we were very busy trying to keep up with events, but 2) we all did get very frustrated with the Vietnamese who kept blaming us for a lot of things and yet were not able to get their own act together to run a government and to prosecute a war in the way that we thought was in their interests to do.

Q: Were any of you sort of thinking "Well, okay if this doesn't work what will happen"? Did you think the equation within Southeast Asia was changing? Was the domino situation still upper most in your mind?

MILLER: Yes. At least, for me personally, until I got home and became director of the Vietnam Desk in 1965. I think we were so absorbed by developments in Vietnam that we probably didn't think a great deal about the impact elsewhere in Southeast Asia, other than to be concerned that if Vietnam went the rest of Southeast Asia would be in danger.

I think that my own doubts really didn't set in until I was caught up in the war in Washington as head of the Vietnam Desk and saw the growing protests here. I got caught up with the atmosphere here with LBJ trying to develop negotiating positions and sending out feelers, etc. We tried bombing pauses to try to encourage negotiations. I was doing a lot of public speaking, explaining our Vietnam policy in the increasingly strident atmosphere in this country between hawks and doves. I think that was where my own doubts about how this was all going to come out and whether it was all worth it in terms of US interests and costs began to building up. But while I was in Vietnam, no, we were frustrated with the Vietnamese but I think we began to feel that Thieu and Ky were beginning to get things back under control—at the beginning of their rule.

Q: Were you there when General Maxwell Taylor came out?

MILLER: Yes.

Q: What was the impression when he came out? It turned out to be another one of those interim things, but did...?

MILLER: I didn't feel that Max Taylor, either, was the right man for that job. Again, a lot of things were going on that the political section, or at least this person who was the number two in the political section, wasn't privy to. Taylor, if you read all the books since then, including the Pentagon Papers, resisted the idea of US combat forces without consultations with the Vietnamese. He got very frustrated with the internal political revolving door governments and was very imperious with the Vietnamese generals. They resented that and at one point tried to get him recalled. I suppose the role of any US ambassador at that point would have been a very tough one. I think that Taylor had a military rather than diplomatic approach in terms of getting the Vietnamese to do things that we wanted to see them do. He tended to be too imperious, I think.

Q: You left there in 1965 and came back to be what, the director of...

MILLER: The Vietnam Working Group.

Q: Which was essentially the Vietnam Desk. What were your functions there?

MILLER: I would say that the function of the Vietnam Working Group was to keep on top of daily developments in Vietnam so that we could brief our superiors, handle queries from the public, and make analyses of the internal political situation in South Vietnam. In other words, we dealt with the mass of routine problems in terms of our involvement in Vietnam without really getting involved in the policy process.

There was a lot going on in the policy process that we were not privy to. I can cite one example. I was asked by my bosses one day to brief a congressman about a certain peace initiative which I knew absolutely nothing about. That was exactly why I was sent up to brief him—because I knew nothing about it. He could tell within two minutes that I didn't know what I was talking about. He said, “Mr. Miller, I thought that you were an expert on Vietnam, yet you obviously don't know and can't give me the information that I need.” “Mr. Congressman,” I said, “In the US government today there are many levels of expertise on Vietnam.” He said, “Well, you go back and tell Secretary Rusk that I am leaving for my constituency this afternoon and unless he tells me what is going on with respect to this peace initiative, I will no longer be able to support him.” I conveyed that message and it got to the Secretary very quickly. I understand he did call the Congressman, and the Congressman stayed on the reservation. We were constantly dealing with this kind of problem where we didn't really know what the Administration was doing, either on the negotiating front or, to some extent, on the internal front as well. So we were really managing the store and doing the routine business and briefing governors, giving speeches—I went over to brief the NATO Council on what was going on in Vietnam. Just doing the routine business made for very long work weeks.

Q: Obviously this is the period of time when the questioning was getting greater and greater. I suppose in some ways for the first time you were up against the real challenges of not just being involved but also getting outside... How was this affecting you?

MILLER: I was getting very tired. Physically and emotionally it was an exhausting job. I guess that I was rapidly being convinced that we ought to find a way to negotiate an end to it. I was relieved when LBJ [actually by then I had gone off to the Imperial Defence College in London] found a formula for stopping the bombing in the North and getting involved in negotiations with the North Vietnamese. This led to the cessation of the bombing, and paved the way to negotiating some kind of solution which, hopefully, would allow us to withdraw.

Q: Did you get a feeling of where was the driving force between our continued military effort and going all out in Vietnam? Was this coming from the White House, or Rusk? Were their different voices, some saying let's negotiate and others saying....?

MILLER: I didn't have much contact even as director of the Vietnam Working Group at the time with the top levels of the Department or the White House, but it is my understanding from everything I have read and heard that basically LBJ was determined to be victorious, and victorious in a way that would not endanger his Great Society goals. Dean Rusk was pretty much with him on that and it was McNamara who began to have serious doubt. There were plenty of people who had doubts. George Ball, Dean Rusk's deputy, was always trying to argue the other side and saying we ought to liquidate this commitment because we were in a no-win situation. He felt our objectives were wrong. There were plenty of people within the Administration and outside of Administration, and certainly growing numbers on the Hill who were trying to persuade the US government to turn around. I think it was the President, himself, who found it very difficult to turn around. The final blow, the straw that broke the camel's back, was Westmoreland's request in March

1967 for 125,000 more troops in addition to the half million he already had in order to finish the job. The Pentagon said it couldn't do that without going to full mobilization.

Q: Did you have any problems keeping your officers on the Vietnam Working Group on the reservation?

MILLER: No, I don't recall that. Whatever their personal views were...no, I think they were all disciplined people.

Q: It really wasn't until a few years later after Cambodia and all that things began to really hit within the bureaucracy.

MILLER: That is right. That was more in the Nixon/Kissinger era than it was in the Rusk/Johnson era. By then I was over at the Peace Talks where we all felt we were at least trying to bring about a negotiation. But even there we began to be convinced that we were just a front for Henry Kissinger. I would say that in the '65-'67 period whatever our personal doubts were, my subordinates on the desk did their job, what they were asked to do and provided their best judgment of the situation in a professional way. We didn't have any revolts in the ranks.

Q: You left the job and had some respite.

MILLER: Yes, I had a year off for good behavior at the Imperial Defence College in London.

Q: When you were there, and obviously coming from your experiences, were you taking a lot of artillery rounds from the various people in the Defence College from the other NATO countries about Vietnam?

MILLER: Actually we also had some Commonwealth countries represented. We had Ghana, India, Pakistan, Malaysia and Jamaica, etc.

Well, that was one of the things that the Commandant of the College was concerned about. He asked me to take a low profile on Vietnam because he didn't want to get us involved in constant debates about US policy in Vietnam, and I was happy to take a low profile. But, nevertheless, the subject did come up and there was a lot of criticism. But I don't remember that it was harassful. I felt that I was at least able to explain our policy in a fairly civilized environment without people getting rambunctious. Basically we tried to stay off the subject of Vietnam and talk about a lot of other things that the British were more interested in talking about.

Q: You were then assigned to the Paris Peace Talks from 1968 to '71. How did you get this assignment and how did you feel about it? I ask this because in the Foreign Service one likes to move around a bit.

MILLER: Looking back on it, from the standpoint of a career pattern it may not have been the best career move, but I was pleased with the assignment. Phil Habib, who had been my boss for the latter part of my term on the desk, replacing Len Unger, asked me to join the delegation. He was the senior career State Department person, the Chief of Staff, of the Delegation. I was pleased. My wife and I loved Paris. We had spent three years there in the NATO delegation as junior officer and were delighted to go back. I thought that at least it was a constructive effort on Vietnam at that point. I have said, and it is probably true, that I stayed a year longer than I might have had the peace talks been anywhere else.

It did get frustrating, however. In the Nixon/Kissinger era which was basically the time I was there, from the Delegation standpoint and certainly with the benefit of hindsight, my view is re-enforced that our negotiating positions were always too little and too late. Sometimes we would say on the Delegation that we had thought of everything but Washington had rejected it. Nixon and Kissinger had their own view about how to play this; how we should withdraw from Vietnam without dishonoring the soldiers who had lost their lives there. They could truly say that they were not responsible for getting us involved

in that war. But anyway, it quickly became apparent that we were not negotiating, we were just going through the motions. The most interesting part was the times that we met privately with the North Vietnamese, which we did do from time to time.

Q: I wonder if you could explain what the setup was?

MILLER: When I joined the Peace Talks on November 1, 1968, the US and North Vietnamese governments had announced agreement on a bombing halt and on wider negotiations that would involve both the Viet Cong and the South Vietnamese government. We were not anxious to have the Viet Cong and they were not anxious to have the South Vietnamese government. This issue led to the 12 weeks that were wasted on negotiating the shape of the table. There was an added factor, of course, that prolonged this delay in getting down to the negotiations: Thieu was determined if he could possibly do it to wait until Nixon became President. It is said that he was hoping that Hubert Humphrey would lose and that Nixon would win so that Nixon would be the one to negotiate. When Nixon did win, he was anxious that real negotiations not begin with Harriman and Vance but that they wait for Nixon's negotiators. So we had a hard time getting the South Vietnamese to agree to anything we negotiated on the shape of the table. The issue, which a lot of people didn't understand because people were fighting and dying in Vietnam while the weeks went by, was whether or not we would recognize the Viet Cong as an independent delegation, which we refused to do, and whether or not Hanoi would recognize the Saigon delegation as independent which they refused to do. So we tried to come up with all kinds of devices and I can remember everyone drawing diagrams of tables. We finally came up with a round table with two separate little tables at the diameter with the tacit agreement that each side could describe the negotiation the way they wanted to, whether it was four sided or two sided. We said it was two sided, and they said it was four sided. Anyway this took 12 weeks before we were able to...

Q: This was more delaying action in a way...

MILLER: It wasn't a delaying action on our part. We were anxious to move ahead. But there was a real issue, the real political issue of whether the Viet Cong were independent, which we were convinced they were not, and whether the Saigon government was independent, which Hanoi at least, was determined to show was not the case. The South Vietnamese also employed delaying tactics because they did not want Harriman to negotiate a peace settlement with Hanoi; they wanted to wait until the Nixon Administration took over.

Q: Did you have any feel that the North Vietnamese saw that perhaps they would do better under the waning days of the Johnson Administration than they would under Nixon, or were they willing to wait it out?

MILLER: I am not sure about that. I really don't have any idea whether they thought they would get a better deal out of the Johnson Administration than the Nixon Administration. I think that their real view was, seeing what was going on in the United States, that if they persevered the United States would finally give them everything they wanted. The basic negotiating issue which kept agreement from being reached for so long was that the North Vietnamese insisted that the Thieu government be dismantled before they would withdraw their troops. We insisted that there be a mutual withdrawal of troops before elections were held to determine what kind of a government South Vietnam would have. Through many permutations and hundreds of meetings that was the basic nut that could never be cracked until, finally, at the end both sides did compromise and talk about the shape of the government that would emerge in South Vietnam—sort of a three tripartite government, as I recall, with elements of the South Vietnamese government, non-communist oppositionists and National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) people—before the troops were withdrawn. The whole negotiating position that we maintained in my view made it easier for the North Vietnamese not to agree and just hold out because we were gradually withdrawing our troops anyway under pressure at home.

Q: Your leadership under the Johnson period was who?

MILLER: During the brief period that I was there before the Nixon Administration came in, it was Harriman and Vance, with Habib again being the senior career person. When Harriman and Vance left—actually Vance stayed on a month into the Nixon Administration as continuity to get the new team started—it was Henry Cabot Lodge and Judge Lawrence Walsh, the Iran Contra Special prosecutor. Lodge stayed for about a year, as I recall. He and Walsh left and then there was an interregnum with Phil Habib as head of the delegation for a while. Then David Bruce was named and he stayed for a year or so. By that time, I left. Then Bill Porter took over the delegation for a while.

Q: Did you have any feeling that the various heads doing this made any great changes or were they under very tight instructions?

MILLER: Very tight instructions.

Q: What was your feeling about dealing with the North Vietnamese, both at the informal and formal sessions?

MILLER: We felt in the informal, private sessions which were away from the press, etc., that we at least had a better understanding of their true positions. The formal sessions at the Hotel Majestic where we would go out and brief the press generally on what transpired were really just so much window dressing. The informal sessions were more productive, but even so, they didn't really change positions. They allowed us to explore more thoroughly whether there was any negotiating flexibility in the other side's position, but that was really about all. But we were really under such tight instructions from Washington that regardless who was head of the delegation we didn't have any negotiating flexibility...what negotiating flexibility we had was carefully controlled from Washington.

Q: You had already had experience in the Vietnam Working Group where you knew you were dealing with nuts and bolts and things like this, but there were gods far above you who were handling these matters. Did you feel that you were doing anything in these negotiations? Was it difficult to keep up ones morale and stamina in doing this when you felt they weren't for real?

MILLER: Yes, toward the end, the last year I was there which was by no means the last year of negotiations, I felt it was time to move on and do something else and that as a delegation we weren't really contributing to any real solutions; we were just part of the Nixon/Kissinger negotiating process of 1) to maintain a basic level of political support in the Congress for the continuing effort in Vietnam and 2) as a cover for what Kissinger was really doing behind the scenes. A lot of what Kissinger was doing behind the scenes we didn't know at the time, at least I didn't know. It became discouraging although we continued to come up with negotiating formuli, which we would discuss among ourselves and present to Bruce, Habib and sometimes they would forward them to Washington.

Q: How did the growing demonstrations in the States affect you, especially those after the Cambodian bombing?

MILLER: They really didn't affect us very much. The subject may have come up in our negotiations or in our meetings but I don't recall that it had a big impact on us in Paris. We were kind of isolated from them because we were concentrating on trying to find a solution.

Q: Was there any time when you could sit down in an informal session with the North Vietnamese and begin to really talk about how this thing could be done?

MILLER: You could get to know them a little bit as human beings, their families and life in Hanoi under the bombing, etc., and talk about American baseball, etc., but we were under such rigid instructions that if we had done our own so-called “walk in the woods” like

Paul Nitze did in Vienna with the Russians on MBFR, we would have been jerked back immediately. If we had sent in a cable saying we had this informal conversation and said, if we did this would you do that, I think Kissinger would have had us drawn and quartered before sundown. The North Vietnamese, themselves, were under very rigid instructions also. So under the circumstances that kind of freewheeling exploration of negotiating positions would not have produced anything.

Q: Were there any military situations occurring during this period that had any effect on you?

MILLER: No, I don't recall that there were. One of the things that we were always concerned about, and Washington was concerned about, was a cease fire in place. One of the reasons, we were not anxious until close to the end to have a cease-fire in place was that South Vietnamese forces and remaining American forces would be at a disadvantage because the Viet Cong were everywhere and a cease-fire in place would have given them an advantage. We were concerned that the military situation remain relatively favorable and not deteriorate so that when it came time to stop firing, our side would not be at a tremendous disadvantage. But other than that I don't recall that there was any military action that we felt had a major impact, in a negative way, on the peace talks.

Q: Did the French play any role in what you were doing except giving you food...?

MILLER: For the most part they played the role of host and provided the site and food during the breaks between sessions, etc. They played some role in the background during the peace feeler time. Kissinger used Jean Sainteny as a messenger at some point to explore possibilities in Hanoi and there were other French people who played behind the scene roles. But once we were in the negotiations, I am not aware that they played any real role.

Q: Then you left the Peace Talk situation and came back to the Secretariat...

MILLER: To be Deputy Executive Secretary of the Department.

Q: I would have thought you would have wanted to get out of that sort of thing.

MILLER: I was a Foreign Service officer and did what I was asked to do. I guess I could have said no, but Ted Eliot, who was the Executive Secretary, called me up and ask if I would come to work for him, and I said fine.

Q: Had much changed in the operation? You had been there in 1957-60.

MILLER: The big change was that there was an Operations Center, manned 24 hours a day which had taken over the Department duty officer function. The other aspect that was different in 1971-73 to what it had been in 1957-60, besides the fact that I was more senior and therefore more directly involved at the policy level, was the constant struggle between the President's National Security Adviser, one Henry Kissinger, and the Secretary of State, William Rogers, for control of the State Department's business. We were constantly trying to instill discipline in the Department and to discourage officers from going around the 7th floor and influencing policy by telephone with an NSC staffer who in effect was being directed by Kissinger to get input from the State Department without going through the Secretary. That was a constant struggle of the Secretariat at the time. Rogers was such a decent gentleman that, while he was sensitive to his prerogatives as Secretary of State, he was not a gut fighter like Henry Kissinger. So we tried to protect him, but I think we again were expending a lot of energy and time in a losing battle.

Q: Did you feel that Rogers played much of a role in foreign policy?

MILLER: I am not sure I felt that at the time, although everybody was constantly aware that Kissinger was over in the White House trying to run with many balls. Again, perhaps our noses were too close to the grindstone in trying to preserve some position for the Secretary of State. We were a supporting organization and had a general sense that it was a constant struggle to keep the Secretary of State from being elbowed out of the way. We

were never sure whether the President wanted it that way or not, but we were, again, as good bureaucrats, trying to protect the traditional role of the State Department. But it is quite clear that Kissinger was the powerhouse and Rogers wasn't.

Q: This was also the period of the opening of China wasn't it?

MILLER: Yes.

Q: That was a White House operation...

MILLER: It was very much a White House operation.

Q: Before we move on, were there any particular crisis or personality that caused you problems?

MILLER: There was the constant problem of the NSC-State Department rivalry. I remember dealing quite a bit by phone with Al Haig at that point and thinking that, as Kissinger's Deputy, he was the only sane person on the NSC. He was a joy to deal with because, with all this Byzantine business going on, when you got a call from Al Haig or you called him up, you knew he would give straight directions or guidance, and if you asked him to do something he would get it for you.

Q: To translate this a little more, let's say you didn't call Al Haig can you give an idea of what might happen?

MILLER: The Secretariat is the formal channel between the State Department and the NSC. As the Executive Secretary and the Deputy Executive Secretary, while there were channels below Haig and Kissinger, we dealt normally with Haig, or there may have been a senior deputy, I don't recall. I just felt that he was a good solid person to deal with because he was never flapped, he was always very clear in what he wanted and needed—sometimes you would hear this guttural voice in the background saying, “Gott damn it, Al,

get off the phone, ve haff vork to do!" He was just a good solid citizen. Whether that made him a good Secretary of State or not is another question.

Q: That is another matter.

MILLER: But Rogers was very much a gentleman. I guess the character most difficult to deal with at that time was Butts Macomber when he was Under Secretary for Management. He had a terrible temper and was generally just an obnoxious person. I don't remember any other big personality problems. Graham Martin was always sounding off and being very demanding as Graham Martin always was. I remember once he refused to go back to his post until the White House would give him an aircraft and they were getting to the point...

Q: Was this in Italy?

MILLER: No, no. Vietnam.

Q: Then you spent a relatively short time, 1973-74, in the Arms Control...

MILLER: Yes, I was Assistant Director for International Affairs for the Arms Control and the Disarmament Agency. I went into a job that was traditionally at that time held by a senior Foreign Service officer. I replaced Jim Leonard. My principal job as it turned out was to chair the interagency backstopping committee for MBFR which was just getting under way. I thought I was becoming an expert in endless negotiations—from Vietnam to MBFR. I did spend a brief time at ACDA, about a year. I was interested in the job but Phil Habib, who had been named Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs, asked me if I wanted to be his deputy for Southeast Asia. Despite having worked on Southeast Asia already too long, I just felt it was too good to turn down. I liked Phil and had a lot of respect for him and I found Fred Ekle who was the director of ACDA at the time, a strange and frustrating guy to work for so I jumped at the chance.

Q: Ekle has had many jobs within the government. What was his operating style?

MILLER: I had two problems with ACDA. One, it became clear to me that ACDA was kind of a no-man's land between State and Defense, and in a sense a political football between the Executive Branch and Legislature Branch. It was constantly buffeted about by pressures either to do more arms control negotiating or by the hawks to do less arms control negotiating. So I felt it was a rather powerless agency—except when it was convenient for both State and Defense, including the NSC, to use ACDA because State didn't want Defense to control play or Defense didn't want State to control the play, and the NSC didn't want the bother of referee between the two. So they chose the representative of the powerless agency to chair the interagency backstopping committee. I found after a year that that was kind of a bore, to be used simply because you represented an agency that had no power.

Secondly, I realized as it was happening that Ikl# and his senior staff were brought in as a kind of housecleaning. There was a lot of criticism on the Hill that ACDA was too full of “bleeding hearts” on arms control, so Ikl# was brought in as a conservative who knew a lot about arms control and who would be tough. They were looking around for somebody to replace Leonard. Secretary Rogers recommended me to Ikl#. My problem with Fred was that while he was a brilliant guy—very smart and very knowledgeable about these issues—I felt that he was naive in the bureaucratic process. We would work like dogs to get a policy decision on a certain issue through the NSC process and the next day he would want to do something else. We would say, “Fred, we just got this issue decided; we can't possibly afford now to undermine the decision even though it may not have come out exactly the way we wanted it. We can't start off on this tangent.” He was a true academic, I think. He loved dealing with ideas. Even if we had gone through this terrible process he had a better idea the following morning which he thought we should try. So when Phil called me up and offered me a job as Deputy Assistant Secretary in EA, I jumped at the chance.

Q: You were in EA from 1974 - 77. What were your responsibilities?

MILLER: I was responsible primarily for Southeast Asia.

Q: Which included what?

MILLER: For the political and politico-military developments of Southeast Asia which included the Philippines through Burma, south of China and down to and including Indonesia.

Q: Australia?

MILLER: No. Australia and New Zealand and even Papua New Guinea were outside of Southeast Asia. They were dealt with by someone dealing with the South Pacific. Actually in my day the economic deputy had responsibility for Australia and New Zealand and the South Pacific.

Q: Phil Habib, of course, has been around for a long time as one of our ace trouble shooters. How did you find him?

MILLER: I am very high on Phil. He is a unique combination of street fighter and integrity. He could be as irritating as hell, very rough, but underneath he had a heart as big as a watermelon. He was a great guy to work for. I really loved working for him. When I got into that job, 99 # percent of it was the final stages of Vietnam and Cambodia. In fact, I was absolutely stunned when I got into the job about September of '74 to find that we were actually counting the days of supply of ammunition for the non-communist forces in Cambodia, and whether we would be able to provide ammunition with AID monies we had. And of course the Congress was getting more and more restive about providing any money at all. They stopped the AID money and the ammunition stopped as well. All of this came to its end within 6 months in Cambodia and 7 months in Vietnam. Then we began planning for the evacuation of the mission in Vietnam and were concerned about

the evacuation of the Vietnamese who had been associated with our effort. So it was a very busy period. When we got through that stage, we got involved with refugee programs and worrying about what was our policy in Southeast Asia post- Vietnam. That was an interesting period.

Q: When the AID money stopped was it the general feeling that for all practical purposes we had written Vietnam and Cambodia off?

MILLER: There was a sense in the Administration that it was not writing Vietnam and Cambodia off; that if anybody was writing them off it was the Congress, the Democratically controlled Congress. But the Congress got to the point where it was determined not to provide any more aid even if the consequences were dire—namely, even if the country went under. I think they had gotten to the point where they thought it had done so much damage to our society that this was the lesser of evils. But the Administration, to the very end, wanted to make sure that if this happened it was clearly as a result of a Democratic Congress and not as a result of the Administration.

Q: How did you feel about the reporting that was coming out of Vietnam under Graham Martin? This has been a very controversial thing.

MILLER: There is no doubt in my mind based on a visit I made to Saigon in October 1974 that Graham Martin ran the most tightly controlled embassy of any I have ever had any association with. I attended, for example, a country meeting while I was there. Nobody was allowed to speak at that meeting if it hadn't been programmed with the Ambassador before hand. That is not the answer to your question. But I am not sure I can answer the question the way you want, namely that reporting was managed or distorted. Graham Martin's modus operandi, as far as I could figure out, was that only he had access to the full range of information. He made sure that only he had access to all that information. He would not let information be generally broadcast. Therefore, only he had the full picture and could make judgments about what was really going on. If Joe Blow in the political

section reported that this was the situation, Graham Martin would say that that was not the situation at all because, “I happen to know things that you don't know about it.” Did that distort the picture? It probably did.

Q: When you were back getting these reports, did you have the feeling that we were almost out of it?

MILLER: As I recall our estimate in the spring of 1975 was that the situation had deteriorated to the extent that the North Vietnamese were likely to capture I Corps and most of II Corps.

Q: These were to the north of Saigon?

MILLER: Yes, that's right. But that III Corps around Saigon and IV Corps could be held. But that was on the assumption that we would continue to provide aid. In a sense the reporting from Saigon was important as supporting or undermining those assessments. As soon as it became clear that the Congress was not about to provide any additional aid, all bets were off. Then we began really concentrating on how to save our people.

Q: Was there a problem with Graham Martin in trying to get this evacuation going?

MILLER: Martin's legitimate concern was not to contribute to the collapse. He was concerned that if we gave signs we were starting to evacuate our people it would show the Vietnamese that we were convinced it was all over and they would, therefore, stop fighting. He was also concerned that if we started evacuating Americans our South Vietnamese allies could in effect turn on us and start shooting down our evacuation planes out of bitterness that we were bugging out. So he had a lot of legitimate concerns about the safety of Americans and about trying to prevent having American actions contribute to the collapse in South Vietnamese. It got to the point where he had to be ordered to prepare for evacuation by providing us with the information we needed in order to organize the logistic support to get people out. Washington had to sit pretty hard on him to get him to do that.

Then he had, I think, an idea that he might stay behind and somehow negotiate through the transition. He was ordered not to do that but to get out on at least the last plane. He was always a curmudgeon and he was curmudgeonly until the very end. Then I think he was concerned that he was somehow going to be made a scapegoat for who lost Vietnam. He wanted to have his record clear so he could defend himself. But, to the credit of Nixon and Kissinger, no one was looking for a scapegoat at that point unless they were wanting to blame the Congress for contributing to the final collapse.

Q: I might point out since we are putting this on the record that evacuating Americans in any situation is always a very tricky thing. If there is civil disorder and you say don't come in that can be a body blow or an insult or what ever you want to call it—a political act, not a minor little matter.

MILLER: That is what I wanted to say—that Graham Martin had some legitimate and difficult concerns that he was trying to deal with. One, the collapse of the government that we had been supporting for so many years, two, the safety of Americans. And how to manage all of this without some massive tragedy taking place.

Q: How did Kissinger get along with Habib?

MILLER: He liked Habib, although I have heard them shout at each other. I think he felt Habib was one of the few career officers that was worthy of Henry Kissinger. He trusted Habib and felt that he was a disciplined career officer who would carry out instructions with class.

Q: Going back to the Vietnam and Cambodia when we were pulling out in the spring of 1975, before it actually happened what was the prognosis of the future of Vietnam and Cambodia?

MILLER: Our assessment, and this was an operational assessment, not a long term assessment, was that probably the Mekong Delta which was the most populous part of

South Vietnam could be held indefinitely, provided we were willing to continue aid. My recollection is that we were less concerned about Cambodia, although Cambodia being next to Thailand, with which we have an ongoing security commitment was of concern. But our principal concern was whether or not the southern part of South Vietnam could be held.

Q: When it became apparent that it was really going to go, what did we think? Did we think Vietnam was going to be a blood bath?

MILLER: There was concern about that and therefore there was concern that we provide a lot of shipping to allow Vietnamese who were trying to escape a blood bath to get away and save themselves. So we did have a lot of ships positioned off the coast. We were concerned about a blood bath. We were certainly concerned that those who were associated with the joint US-South Vietnamese effort were very much in danger if they stayed behind. And we know that many who did stay behind or couldn't get out got put into re-education camps and were treated very badly for a long time.

Q: Were you able to do any coordinating beforehand about what to do with refugees?

MILLER: Yes, in addition to planning for evacuation, we began to plan how to handle up to a million Vietnamese refugees and it very quickly became apparent that this was a job too big for the East Asian Bureau because so many domestic US agencies were involved in terms of setting up camps, etc. So very early in the game an interagency task force was established as an adjunct to the Operation Center which plugged into the White House and into domestic agencies and also voluntary agencies who were called upon to provide clothing, shelter, organize family sponsorships, etc. This effort was underway pretty quickly after the collapse if it wasn't started before the collapse. Julia Taft was named as the first permanent head of the task force. She was excellent—a real mover and shaker. She had people like Bob Keeley who had come out of Cambodia, and Frank Wisner, who had come out of Vietnam as her senior deputies and they were plugging into all the agencies and we

were getting appropriations to be devoted to this. What the legal situation—getting them into the country—was I don't recall. We set up camps around the country and proceeded to get voluntary agencies to find sponsors for refugees. It became a very major effort.

Q: What about Cambodia?

MILLER: Well, Cambodia was important, but secondary to Vietnam. It was kind of Vietnam's flank. I visited Cambodia in 1974 while on a trip to Vietnam and remember coming back feeling pretty good about South Vietnam but that Cambodia was really on the ragged edge if it couldn't get ammunition from us. My recollection is that we really focused much more on what would happen to Vietnam than we did on Cambodia, because Vietnam was the prize really. Cambodia was important but really secondary to Vietnam. It was clear that Cambodia was going to collapse sooner than South Vietnamese would collapse. I think what we overlooked with respect to South Vietnam was the psychological impact on the South Vietnamese regime and people when they finally realized that the Congress wasn't going to provide any more aid; the place then collapsed like a house of cards.

Q: Cambodia collapsed, South Vietnam collapsed, what did your organization do then?

MILLER: We continued to deal with the refugee problems although the basic action responsibility had gone to the task force. We had a fairly immediate problem with Thailand because we had about 40,000 troops there, mostly supporting our military operations in Vietnam. The question was, would they stay or go? We had an negotiation with the Thai where we ended up taking out all the troops except for the military attach# and military assistance group. We would have preferred to leave a small residue of people there, about 3,000, but we couldn't get agreement with the Thai on that. The Thai were very sensitive, once we failed in Vietnam, and did not want to irritate the North Vietnamese anymore than necessary. It was a fairly quick negotiation.

And then we began to try and think further ahead about what our policy should be toward Southeast Asia in the aftermath of Vietnam. In the East Asian Bureau, we were anxious that the U.S. government not make any rash decisions to “turn tail” and ignore Southeast Asia. We spent some time on policy papers and thinking about our relations with the new regional organization—the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which includes the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and now Brunei. So a lot of our attention was focused on how to preserve a constructive relationship with that remainder of Southeast Asia.

There was another set of problems we were dealing with— residue problems concerning Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. One, would we maintain an embassy in Laos, and we finally did, at the Charg# level; two, we imposed trade and finance embargoes on Vietnam and Cambodia; and three, we had to testify before the Congress on a number of issues. There were many Congressmen who felt we had made a mistake in imposing the embargoes. I testified on our rationale on imposing these embargoes. Then there were people who were pressing us to provide humanitarian aid to Vietnam and Cambodia. That was a policy decision that Kissinger had to make. The issue was work-intensive because he wanted to look at every request, every Band-Aid, etc. that humanitarian agencies wanted to send to Vietnam. It was a busy post-Vietnam period.

Q: While you were there did you see any possibility of developing relations with the new Vietnamese government?

MILLER: When the Carter Administration came in, which was shortly before I left, they would have developed relations with Vietnam very quickly if it hadn't been for Hanoi's gluttony in insisting on the alleged 3 # billion dollars in aid that Nixon had “promised them” for signing the Paris Agreements. When Hanoi insisted on getting its 3 # billion as a price of diplomatic relations, even the Carter Administration, which was eager to overcome hatreds and tensions of the Vietnam era, could not agree to that demand. I suppose you could say that Hanoi outsmarted itself in that regard. So there was a point when relations

could have been quickly established with no conditions attached, but the Vietnamese attached such impossible conditions that it just fell apart.

Q: How did you view the role of China, the People's Republic of China? The rationale for our being in Vietnam for a long time was that we wanted to keep the communist Chinese out. As the Vietnam war wore down did we see China becoming a non problem in the area?

MILLER: In my view, we over-interpreted the Sino-Soviet bloc as a monolith and in doing so we almost made the Sino-Soviet bloc a self-fulfilling prophecy. The more I think about this question the more I am convinced, with the great benefit of hindsight, that the first strategic error was made by the Truman Administration in allowing General MacArthur to go to the Yalu in Korea. This triggered a major Chinese military confrontation with US forces and made China an adversary twenty years beyond what might have otherwise been the case. If you read the record, after the fall of China in 1949 there was consideration given to nearly reconciliation with China; there even was some consideration of this after the Korean War during the Eisenhower/Dulles era. But the fact that the Chinese had become military enemies of ours in the Korean War, I think, so stewed our perception of this Sino-Soviet bloc that we didn't exploit the tensions and potential tensions between Moscow and Beijing. Had we done so, we might have been able to put the problem of Vietnam into a much more limited perspective. We may have done the same kind of things and made a lot of the same kind of mistakes. But if we had done it as a problem limited to Vietnam, rather than making of Vietnam the front line between communism and the free world, we might have avoided some of the mistakes that we made. It might not have become such a vital interest to us that we felt it was at the time.

Q: We learned to live with it after it went and the world went on.

MILLER: That's right. The rest of Southeast Asia is more prosperous and stable than ever.

Q: Were you waiting for something to happen from China or had you felt that Vietnam was such an entity in itself at that point that the traditional dislike of China...?

MILLER: My recollection is that we took for granted the fact that the US was never going to have relations with China. Rightly or wrongly, China was part of the adversarial support for Vietnam just as the Soviet Union was and it was an element that we had to deal with. Some consideration was given to invading North Vietnam, but because of our experience in Korea everyone was concerned about bringing the Chinese in. So we looked on China as an enemy supporting Vietnam until Nixon came along and, quite rightly I think, tried to find a way to open a dialogue with China. My point is that that had been done twenty years before if we had restricted our objective in Korea.

Q: That is, not going over the 38th parallel.

MILLER: Or at least sticking to limited military requirements in and around the 38th parallel. Maybe we could have reconciled with China a lot sooner. Maybe Vietnam would have looked like a more limited problem had we done so. Q: Did you have much to do with the Philippines?

MILLER: Yes, I got involved in the Philippine base negotiations in 1976.

Q: It always seems to be a base negotiation or preparing for a base negotiation.

MILLER: Yes, that's right. Bill Sullivan, who was then Ambassador to the Philippines, wanted me to come out and be thoroughly briefed on all these bases. I was chairing the interagency committee working with Defense on our negotiating instructions to him. He wanted to be sure I understood the importance of all those bases. So I went out and spent about ten days touring around the Philippines. But in the end, Marcos demanded more money than the generous package that the Ford Presidency, with Kissinger as Secretary of State, was prepared to give. Marcos gambled that he might get a better deal out of the Carter Administration. It was too close to the end of the Ford Administration for the

negotiations to be consummated; they died out because we were not willing to pay what Marcos asked for. He didn't get any more and in fact I think he got less from the Carter Administration. But we did have a fairly major negotiation.

Q: Was there any concern about the Marcos regime at that particular point?

MILLER: Yes, there was already a lot of criticism of the Marcos regime. For example, Manglapus, who is the current Foreign Minister, was here as a dissident at that point; he was stirring up criticism of our policy towards the Philippines and our tolerance of Marcos.

Q: Also, of course, we were so concerned over the collapse in Vietnam that we didn't...

MILLER: Marcos was not a major problem at that time, as I recall.

Q: Why don't we call if off for now. We'll quit here and come back another time.

MILLER: Okay.

[end of tape 2][beginning of tape 3]

Q: September 19, 1990. This is the second interview with Ambassador Robert H. Miller concerning his career. In our last tape we ended up talking about when you were Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asia with responsibilities for Southeast Asia. So now we are coming to the period of 1977-80 when you were ambassador to Malaysia. How did this appointment come about?

MILLER: I had been in the Department for six years and Deputy Assistant Secretary in the East Asian Bureau for three years since 1974, and, of course, at that time there was a change in administration. Jimmy Carter had been elected in November 1976 and the new team under Cyrus Vance came in on January 20, 1977. Dick Holbrooke was appointed Assistant Secretary for East Asia and Pacific Affairs. He had been a junior Foreign Service officer when I had been a First Secretary in Saigon, and I think we both agreed that it

was time for me to move on as he came in to take over his duties. I didn't have anything against Dick Holbrooke and I don't think he had anything against me. But I had been there for 3 years and he wanted his own team. As a career officer my hat was thrown into the ambassadorial ring at that point and eventually out came Malaysia. This made sense from my standpoint and the Department's because I had a lot of experience in Southeast Asia, particularly in the Indochina problem by then, and had been working for the past couple of years, since the fall of Saigon and Phnom Penh, on the whole range of Southeast Asian problems. So the powers-that-be approved my nomination as Ambassador to Malaysia. I was confirmed by the Senate and left for my post in June of that year.

Q: Were you getting any feeling that there were political appointees who were trying to get this job? After all Malaysia would seem like a nice appointment to give to somebody who is a non-professional.

MILLER: I don't recall at the time feeling that political appointees were making it difficult to get an appointment as an ambassador or even that it was difficult to get Kuala Lumpur as an ambassadorship. My recollection is that there were a lot of people contending the ambassadorships at the beginning of the Carter Administration, including political appointees, and I sensed that I was fortunate to get Kuala Lumpur with all the competition, career and political. I do not recall that I was specifically contending against a potential political appointee.

Q: There was an attempt, I think, in the Carter Administration to try to get professional appointments, wasn't there?

MILLER: I assume that Carter was under the usual pressure as the victorious presidential candidate to name political appointees. Most of his appointments in Southeast Asia were career appointees with the exception of Dick Kneip in Singapore. Kneip was a former governor of South Dakota who had been a political crony of Jimmy Carter's or had gotten to know him during the presidential campaign. He had no background in diplomacy

and I think little instinct for it. But other than that I would agree with you that the Carter Administration, whether it was the influence of Cyrus Vance or not, appointed a good percentage of good career people as ambassadors.

Q: As you went out did you have the feeling that the Carter Administration and Holbrooke came in and wanted to change course towards Southeast Asia, or...?

MILLER: Dick Holbrooke, himself as an old Vietnam hand and having participated in the preparation of the Pentagon Papers under the aegis of Secretary of Defense McNamara —was intent on reconciling with Vietnam and establishing diplomatic relations and getting on to having a productive relationship with all of Southeast Asia. This was the kind of the turning point that Dick had hoped to accomplish during his stewardship of the East Asian Bureau.

My own view is that two things intervened to thwart Dick in achieving those goals. One was the drive in the White House to establish diplomatic relations with China. Chinese-Vietnamese relations were tense, as they have often been throughout history, and the White House gave priority to improving our relations with China rather than with Vietnam.

The second thing that thwarted Dick in his desire to see a reconciliation with Vietnam was Vietnam's mistake of demanding what they alleged was Nixon's commitment to provide 3.5 billion dollars in aid as the price for establishing diplomatic relations. Of course Nixon's commitment for the 3 billion plus in aid was if the North Vietnamese would honor their signature on the peace agreements as negotiated in Paris during the Nixon/Kissinger years. And, of course, they hadn't done that. They had swept over South Vietnam and unified Vietnam by force. It was politically impossible—not even Dick Holbrooke was in favor of meeting that condition, and therefore any hope of reconciling with Vietnam went a-glimmering during the Carter Administration and while Dick was Assistant Secretary of East Asian Affairs. Later, of course, during the Carter Administration Vietnam invaded and

occupied Cambodia and that made it impossible for any administration for some years to come to establish relations with Vietnam.

Q: What was the situation in Malaysia when you arrived there in 1977?

MILLER: Our relations with Malaysia were traditionally very good. We had two areas of contention within the context of overall relations. One was sort of a traditional problem or difference of perspective between the number one consumer nation for primary products and Malaysia, a number-one producer of primary products. In this case tin, rubber and palm oil. Malaysia was very supportive of the UNCTAD proposal at the time for a common fund into which consumers and producers would provide funds to help stabilize world prices of eighteen or so of these products, which were very vulnerable to price swings because of either over- production or over-consumption. The US had a very different perspective, feeling that the fund would never work—that it would be too cumbersome, although we were in the process of negotiating through the UNCTAD mechanism. We had many differences with Malaysia and other primary producers on the subject of the common fund.

The other, more immediate crisis problem, was the great flow of Vietnamese boat people across Malaysian beaches. It had already begun by the time I arrived in the middle of 1977 and became a crisis problem for Malaysia over the next couple of years. Malaysia, of course, felt that we were responsible for the flow as we had failed in Vietnam and that also as a big wealthy country we had the obligation to take these refugees almost before they landed on the beaches. That was a constant irritant in our relations during my tenure in Malaysia.

Q: How did you deal with that problem?

MILLER: Essentially we dealt with it by working with the Malaysians, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' representative in Kuala Lumpur, and with other resettlement countries like France, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and others, to solve Malaysia's

problem. I felt that it was a considerable accomplishment on the part of the US mission while I was ambassador there to increase the intake of refugees for resettlement into the United States from something like 600 a month to about 5500 a month. So we had a tremendous refugee operation in Malaysia at the time headed by a young fellow, Joe Gettier who worked wonders, both in terms of gearing up on the US side to take these refugees and working out the various problems both with the UN machine and with the Malaysian government. He really accomplished miracles.

Q: Was he working under you?

MILLER: He was with AID, of course, but working under my authority and direction basically to do what we could to relieve the pressure on the Malaysians.

Q: How did you deal with Washington? I assume there was always reluctance. They would much rather not have the problem.

MILLER: The Washington perspective was different than the field perspective. The Washington perspective was that Indochinese refugees had to be resettled within US communities and therefore there was a big domestic political aspect that the people in Washington had to deal with. There was a big bureaucratic, interagency organization which plugged also into domestic departments and agencies of the government and into the great private sector voluntary agencies in order to get local communities to accept these refugees. From the field we were always pressing for earlier decisions and decisions for bigger quotas. From the Washington perspective, they were pressing us to increase international cooperation—get more countries to take more so we could take less—and also getting us to press the local UN authorities to improve conditions of the local camps in order to reduce the incidence of disease, to improve the screening process to make sure that we didn't take in what we would call any “ringers” from the standpoint of our laws and regulations. We couldn't take ex-criminals, drug dealers, and obviously we couldn't take people with communicable diseases. We also had criteria as to what categories of

refugees we could take. People with relatives already in this country, people who had worked for the US government in Vietnam, etc. So Washington had a different perspective putting a lot of pressure on us and we had a field perspective putting a lot of pressure on Washington. But together I think we accomplished a tremendous movement of refugees during the time that I was there.

Q: Were the Malaysian authorities cooperative or were they difficult to deal with?

MILLER: Overall we got a lot of cooperation. There were crises. From the Malaysian standpoint they have a very delicate ethnic balance in the country which I used to call the fatal flaw of Malaysia. It was one of the most successful former colonies among all the former colonies throughout the world. It was one of the most prosperous, most politically stable, but they have an “ethnic fault” line running the length and breadth of their country between the Malay Muslims and the pork-eating Chinese. They looked upon this tremendous, uncontrollable flow of refugees on their beaches as an uncontrollable influx of people of Chinese culture—many Vietnamese refugees were of Chinese origin.

Q: The Vietnamese essentially come not from the Malay culture but from southern China.

MILLER: Not only that but all of these Chinese-culture people were coming across the beaches in some of the most traditionally Muslim Malay areas of Malaysia, thereby creating difficult and tense internal domestic political problems for the moderate Malaysian government. Therefore the Malaysian government had domestic pressures on them, including from radical Islamic elements which were anxious to embarrass the moderate Malaysian Government, to get us, because it was all our fault, to solve this problem immediately. When there were new influxes of boats on the east coast—they seem to come in waves—that was when our moments with the Malaysian government became the most tense. But both governments realized that we had to work together to solve the problem. I think they recognized from the statistics that we and the rest of the

international world were stepping up our intake of refugees. I think they realized that we were cooperating and we were able to work out whatever transitory problems there were.

One of the big crises was when a big old cargo boat called the Hai Hong arrived, for the first time on the west coast of Malaysia, about 20 miles from Kuala Lumpur, with 2500 refugees aboard who were not starving, but were underfed, and among whom disease was beginning to break out. It was an overcrowded, desperate humanitarian situation. The Malaysian government's reaction was to tow the ship out to sea and not let it land. It was the last straw for them. I was getting urgent instructions from Washington not to allow that boat to be towed out to sea. The US TV network cameramen were there to film this thing. I went to see the Prime Minister, and we talked the thing out and he finally agreed—he was being pressed, of course, by his experts to get the thing towed out to sea so that they could ignore it. But finally, the Prime Minister agreed that, if we and the other members of the international community and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees would interview the refugees on the boat, in the harbor and take them directly to the airport to go to their resettlement country, so that the Malaysian government could assure its people that they were not increasing the number of refugees in the country, they would not tow the boat out to sea. We worked out that compromise and that crisis was solved.

Q: You must have done a great deal of work together with the Australians, Canadians, French, and to some extent the British?

MILLER: Frequently. We usually met under the auspices of the local UN High Commissioner for Refugees, who was at that time an Indian gentleman, one, to solve problems for providing adequate care for the refugees in the camps; two, to present a common front the best we could with the Malaysian government; and three, to work out the problems of quotas, categories of refugees, etc. The Malaysians, as time went on, became concerned about what they called the “residual refugees” whom nobody would take; they were afraid that they were going to be stuck with them. There were certain hardened criminals, or people who for one reason or another were totally unskilled and therefore fit

no resettlement country's criteria for acceptance. We would get together to discuss those problems and see whether we could come to agreement that some country, one country or another, would accept them to take them off Malaysia's hands. So we did work very closely with the other resettlement countries.

Q: Did Vietnam have representation in Malaysia at that time?

MILLER: Vietnam had an ambassador, and the Malaysians, had bilateral and also ASEAN discussions with the Vietnamese, but at that time in the late '70s, the Vietnamese were not very cooperative. The Malaysian and other ASEAN governments had the feeling that the Vietnamese were trying to encourage the outflow of refugees in order to destabilize the rest of Southeast Asia. I don't know whether they were correct or not.

Q: So there wasn't any really working together...?

MILLER: No, not at all. The Vietnamese, I believe, attended big international conferences on refugees in Geneva and there was pressure put on them to cooperate and slow down the outflow, etc. But in Malaysia proper where I was working I don't recall any instance or evidence of Vietnamese cooperation with the Malaysians or with the international community.

Q: What was you impression of the UN and the caliber of person you had to deal with?

MILLER: I would say very good. They had lots of problems of coordinating this international effort—international staff coming from different bureaucratic cultures and backgrounds trying to work together—but I would say that even though we had our frustrations with them and they with us, that on the whole their operation was very effective.

Q: What were American economic interests in Malaysia and how did you deal with these?

MILLER: Our basic interest was to try to encourage US investment in the country and also in Malaysia as one member of a regional grouping—ASEAN. We had a growing investment on the part of EXXON. They had an expanding oil drilling and production operation on the east coast of Malaysia. While I was there oil companies also brought into production a natural gas extraction operation in east Malaysia off of Sarawak and Sabah. So there were big US oil investments there along with other countries' oil companies. We had a fairly major and growing semi-conductor investment in Malaysia. US companies, Texas Instruments and a number of other companies, were installed there. They were competing with the Japanese semi-conductor companies that were also getting installed there.

One of the problems for the American business community was Malaysia's new economic policy. The policy had been instituted after the race riots of 1969 where hundreds of Malays and Chinese were killed. The Malaysian government had decided on an economic policy designed to equalize the opportunities for Malays to improve their economic conditions. The government set certain rules for foreign companies as well as domestic companies which required that Malays by 1993 have up to 1/3 of the equity in these companies, that Malays be represented on the board of directors, and that Malays be adequately represented on the employment rolls. This gave some of the American businessmen some difficulties in terms of finding qualified Malays, etc. In effect, it was a massive equal opportunity program for the majority. On balance, I think the US businessman found that he could operate in Malaysia, that Malaysia was receptive to foreign investment. As I recall, our investment probably including the oil investment was something over a million dollars while I was there.

Q: Texas Instruments moved much of its production there and in a way we encourage this type of investment, but at the same time it means a drain on American jobs. Is the ambassador getting directions from Washington concerning this? How does this play out?

MILLER: That is an interesting subject, and a confusing one. The Carter Administration, as I recall, changed the rules under which we were operating with respect to American business. As I recall, we were not to encourage US companies to try to sell arms. There was an attempt at least to leave the armament companies more on their own. Similarly, we were to be neutral with respect to the desire of American companies to find investments in Malaysia. Our role was more or less restricted to making sure that American companies were treated fairly and equally with Japanese companies, British companies, French companies, in other words, with other international companies working in Malaysia and that they were treated fairly by the Malaysian government if they had any problems.

Q: Did you have trouble with businessmen at this time? Did they complain about not getting enough help from the embassy?

MILLER: I don't recall any specific problem from an American businessman saying that we were not giving him enough help. Let me make a couple of points. One, I was very pleased that during my tenure in Malaysia the American business community formed an American business council and they got the Malaysian government's approval for the council. It was an American chamber of commerce, but for some reason the Malaysians didn't want it known by that name. We also succeeded in getting the then deputy prime minister, now prime minister, Mahathir as the first formal speaker before that club. I think that was a very good beginning for the council because basically Mahathir at that time laid down the rules by which foreign businessmen were to operate in Malaysia. He said, “We made the rules to solve our own internal problems, but we want foreign investment and if you are willing to play by our rules you will find a very receptive climate here.” And then he said, “If any of you find in dealing with the Malaysian bureaucracy inconsistent with what I say here today, come and see me.” And a couple of businessmen did come to me saying that they were have problems and would like to get to see the deputy prime minister to see if they could be worked out. He did receive them and I understood that their problems were

resolved. So, I would say we had a fairly good and constructive relationship with those in government, including the deputy prime minister.

I recall businessmen have individual problems, some of which, I think, were self-inflicted, but I don't ever recall getting the complaint that there was general unhappiness with the role of the US embassy.

Q: One of the things we try to do in these oral histories is to aim them at people who probably have not been involved in foreign affairs themselves. Could you tell us what you would do during a day as an ambassador in Malaysia?

MILLER: I would start out by reading the morning cable traffic...

Q: This would be from the Department of State.

MILLER: Well, from the Department of State to find out if we had any new instructions in terms of demarches to make on the Malaysian government, or reports to send to Washington to answer their queries. I would read cables from neighboring posts to see if there were any regional developments that affected our business one way or another in Malaysia. I would certainly read cables from other major capitals of the world that were sent our way to keep up to date on major world developments. I would also read religiously the Wireless File, the document sent out daily by USIA containing important public statements by the President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, as well as articles which would keep us up to date on major developments within the United States. In other words, try to keep well informed about what was going on in the world, in the United States, in the region where I was serving and elsewhere in the world, to make sure that I was up to date on anything that might affect the conduct of my responsibilities in Malaysia.

The second thing I would do is have a staff meeting with at least the Deputy Chief of Mission, the Political and Economic Counselors, the Defense Attach#, the PAO and

maybe one or two others to sort of plan our work day and to see whether I needed to be brought up to date on any developments that they were aware of but which I was not aware of.

Thirdly, almost any work day would have a number of appointments. Either a visiting American businessman; a foreign ambassador who wanted to call on me to compare notes about something; or perhaps a visitor from Washington, either an official visitor or an unofficial visitor who would want a briefing. There would probably be either some luncheon commitment or a dinner commitment that would require my attendance either for social reasons or for business reasons; to make contacts under informal circumstances with colleagues, with Malaysian government officials, with American businessmen, etc.

Finally during the course of the afternoon, a lot of reports, primarily cables, would end up on my desk for approval for transmittal to Washington to answer Washington's requests for information, or initiated by us to make sure Washington was aware of developments in Malaysia in case they got press queries or congressional queries, or so we could on a continuing basis contribute to the policy-making process in Washington.

Q: The social side—the reception or cocktail is often the bane of the foreign service life. How valuable were they?

MILLER: I would say that if you include cocktail parties, dinner parties and other social invitations, I think they are very important for a number of reasons. They are also a lot of hard work, not just social occasions. You never know when you are going to find out something from somebody that is important to you in carrying out your responsibilities. Very often you could find out things on social occasions that people would be reluctant to tell you in a formal setting in the office. In terms of social occasions generated by Malaysian officials, there again you were showing them that you were interested in things they considered important—ceremonies, ribbon cutting ceremonies or other traditional ceremonies or occasions and therefore you were building up your knowledge

and understanding of the local culture, what they considered important and hopefully making a favorable impression on them so that you would improve your ability to deal with them and carry our your responsibilities. If you got to know the ministers well or the secretaries general in the ministries, when you had to go see them on business and sometimes make points on which they disagreed, if you had a good personal relationship with them the conduct of business was made that much easier. The process of developing a good working relationship was enhanced by seeing them in informal social situations. So the cocktail circuit is very hard work, but it does serve an important underlying purpose.

Q: How did you find your staff?

MILLER: I had a very good staff. It was my first ambassadorial assignment and I was very pleased with my staff. I can't think of any professional staff member who was a problem, whom I didn't feel was pulling his or her weight. It was a very productive staff.

Q: Did you have much dealing with people in the embassies of neighboring countries?

MILLER: Yes. We had a relatively small diplomatic corps and a very close-knit one. The Singapore ambassador was the Dean. He had been there many years. He is now the president of Singapore. He was a highly respected colleague who did what he could to get us together. But we also had our own professional reasons to see our colleagues to exchange information and judgments, to coordinate positions, etc. I don't recall any of the ambassadors or charg#s in Malaysia who were difficult to get to know with the exceptions of the ones representing countries we had no relations with, like the North Koreans and Libyans. But we saw a lot of each other and often compared notes. It was particularly important to stay in touch with the countries that were taking refugees in order to work out problems, compare notes, exchange ideas, etc.

Q: This particular time from '77 to '80 what was the feeling of those involved in matters with Vietnam? Was there the feeling that Vietnam might become a major destabilizing power in the area?

MILLER: During the first year and half or so that I was there, the intentions and motivations of the Vietnamese were suspect because of the great refugee outflow and the impact it was having on the entire region. There were efforts on the part of the ASEAN governments in particular to try to persuade Vietnam to slow down the outflow. Vietnam was not cooperative at all. Then, of course, when Vietnam invaded Cambodia and occupied it at the end of 1978, there was great consternation and I think indeed a genuine feeling on the part of the ASEAN countries, particularly closest to Cambodia like Malaysia and Thailand, that Vietnam may have aggressive designs on the region. And we were concerned about that. Vietnam had just signed a security pact with the Soviet Union and nobody was quite sure what Vietnam's ultimate intentions were. So there was great concern in the region and I think a great concern on the part of many foreign embassies there.

We were still in the period of the aftermath of the fall of Vietnam and Cambodia to communism and the failure of the US effort there. There was apprehension on a lot of people's part that the US was “going to turn tail and run.” We tried to assure them that that was not the case. We indicated our interest in establishing a dialogue with the ASEAN countries whenever they were ready. We pointed out that we continued to have security ties both with the Philippines and Thailand and that we maintained these commitments.

So there was concern about the security, stability of the region and about Vietnam's intentions. There were a lot of common concerns throughout the diplomatic community, particularly the Western diplomatic community and the ASEAN diplomatic community.

Q: Well, then you left Kuala Lumpur and went back to the Department in 1980. How did that assignment come about and what were you doing?

MILLER: When I was on home leave in 1979, Ben Read, then Under Secretary for Management, asked me if I would be willing to work for him as Director for Management Operations. My reaction was that I always go where I am needed. I felt it was a little early to leave Malaysia and I said that I would prefer not to come back until I had completed at least three years there. He was at that time considering other candidates, but finally he chose me and pressed me to get back in March 1980 which was earlier than I would have preferred.

So I came back in March 1980 to be Director for Management Operations, my first management job in the Department. I was there for three years during the transition from the Carter Administration to the Reagan Administration.

Q: What were your responsibilities?

MILLER: Larry Eagleburger had set up the office when he was Under Secretary for Management as a management tool to help him run herd on the three great empires under his jurisdiction— Personnel, the Comptroller's Office and the Administration Bureau. He wanted a small staff that had no operational responsibilities to help sort out the priorities and recommendations coming up from these three big empires in order to help him make independent judgments and decisions.

Within that general framework, the specific task of M/MO as it was called, Management Operations, was to help the Under Secretary for Management allocate the resources of the Department in support of foreign policy priorities. We also had some additional specific tasks. We were assigned the unpopular task of overseeing the so called MODE program, the interagency program designed to monitor the limits on all agencies' employment overseas. A very unpopular program.

Q: Why was this MODE program so unpopular?

MILLER: As part of the annual budget process, OMB set agency-by-agency worldwide ceilings on overseas employment in US diplomatic missions which the State Department was then directed to enforce. Under that program, during the Carter Administration, and I think it had also been enforced during the Nixon and Ford Administrations, if an agency was up against its OMB overseas personnel ceiling and wanted to put additional personnel, say, in Amman, Jordan it had to propose to take somebody out of Bonn, Germany, let's say, in order to keep within its worldwide ceiling. This became a cumbersome and basically unworkable procedure, but the State Department liked to manage it because it was one way to keep control over the mushrooming of other agencies within US embassies abroad.

When the Reagan Administration came in, President Reagan sought to bolster our defense expenditures and to build up our defense and intelligence capabilities abroad. Secretary Weinberger immediately found that the State Department—my office— was blocking his ability to send more people to Cairo, where we were building up aid programs, because the Defense Department had no more overseas personnel ceiling to do so. And therefore, in effect, he said to Haig, then Secretary of State, “Your minions are preventing me from carrying out the President's foreign policy.” Haig had enough problems of his own with Weinberger and the White, House and so basically directed us to dismantle the operation. I was put in charge of dismantling the operation. Many people in the State Department thought that I was betraying the State Department because I was dismantling the one mechanism whereby the State Department could control the overseas presence of other agencies of government.

Q: What was the State Department's concern about other agencies?

MILLER: The State Department looked upon itself as responsible for the conduct of foreign affairs abroad. With the Secretary of State being the first cabinet officer and the President's principal foreign affairs adviser, the State Department looked on itself as the Secretary's agency for maintaining this primacy in foreign affairs. Therefore we felt we

properly had a role in controlling the burgeoning of other agencies staffs abroad. My own personal view is that this was a losing ball game. Not because the State Department didn't have genuine responsibilities of managing and coordinating US foreign policy abroad, but because US foreign policy as it was conducted abroad was becoming more complex and more inter-related in terms of the responsibilities of many agencies. Arbitrary ceilings on the positions available to other agencies was not the way for us to maintain our primacy in foreign affairs. But the instinct of the State Department was to keep other agencies down so that we could maintain our primacy in the running of our missions abroad.

Q: You had a chance to look at the guts of the management part of the State Department. One of the accusations that I have heard many times is that those who are in the State Department really don't want to manage. They are interested in policy formulation, etc. and often so interested in the problems of policy that they lose sight of the fact that unless you are a good manager you may not get what you want. How did you feel about this?

MILLER: I feel that the word “management” is over-worked. I think the word “leadership” is a better one. The State Department is weak on providing leadership—and I am talking now about the State Department as a bureaucracy and not the relationships between the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense or the Director of CIA. State tends to substitute insistence on its prerogatives and on institutional mechanisms such as MODE for genuine leadership in the field of foreign affairs. For example, when we dismantled the MODE operation and negotiated a new procedure to replace it, we put much more responsibility on the chief of mission abroad to make decisions as to what he needed as the President's representative to carry out his responsibilities in the country to which he was accredited. It was my experience that very few chiefs of mission were willing to exercise that authority and that instead, they were constantly passing the buck back to the State Department to solve their problems for them.

In general, when State Department senior officers are asked to chair interagency groups to review the policy toward country x or country y, they tend to rely on mechanisms rather

than on forceful leadership to solve their problems. I think there is a weakness in the State Department on that score. In defense of the State Department, the conduct of foreign affairs has become so complex across the broad spectrum that it does in fact have to be coordinated out of the White House. There is a State Department point of view and a State Department responsibility, but the broad coordination of foreign policy really must come out of the White House. Because almost every agency of government is involved in some way or another in our relations with foreign countries as is our whole society, whether it is a journalist or academic, scientist or travel group, you name it, there is so much contact between countries today that the role of the State Department, in my view, has shrunk relatively in the whole foreign policy spectrum. Commerce and Treasury, for example, to say nothing of Defense, have major foreign policy responsibilities. This is why foreign policy must be coordinated in the White House. Nevertheless, the State Department, headed by the President's first cabinet officer, the Secretary of State, could exercise dynamic inter-agency leadership in foreign policy formulation and implementation. In my view, it fails to exercise that leadership and, instead, takes a parochial view of its prerogatives. As a result, from the White House's viewpoint State is just one of the foreign affairs agencies that needs coordinating.

Q: You had two leaders, two Under Secretaries. First there was Ben Read, who had been there for some time, and then Richard Kennedy.

MILLER: And Jerry Van Gorkom.

Q: Can you do a little comparing and contrasting to how they viewed their power within the State Department and their interest in what was happening?

MILLER: Ben Read and Dick Kennedy and then Jerry Van Gorkom, who was brought in from the business world, were three very different personalities. First of all, Ben Read is a very gentle soul with a lot of experience in the State Department and with his own views of

how the resources of the Department should be managed. Dick Kennedy was probably the most difficult supervisor I ever had.

Q: He came out of the Army didn't he?

MILLER: He had been an Army officer. He had worked with Haig on the National Security Staff and he is a man who, at least in that job according to my experience, transmitted pressure on him to his staff rather than absorbing it. He was just very difficult to work for. Jerry Van Gorkom came in as a personal friend of George Shultz, but very quickly ran afoul of Kenneth Dam, who thought he was the senior manager of the Department. Van Gorkom didn't stay very long. He found that his frustrations were too great and he left very soon.

The position of Under Secretary for Management is very difficult because there are many pressures on the Under Secretary which make it virtually impossible for the Department to operate in a rational fashion. Every time the Under Secretary for Management or one of his senior assistants makes a decision it makes somebody unhappy; great effort is therefore undertaken to overturn that decision and very often the decision is in fact overturned. So, managing the Department is a tough job. Sometimes a decision is overturned by the Congress, sometimes it is overturned by the Secretary, sometimes it is overturned by the White House. The rational use of resources in the conduct of foreign policy is still more an art than a science. This is why I ended up believing that management operations was an injury the Department could not afford, if one measured results against resources. We conducted many studies during my stewardship of M/MO of how to streamline, rationalize and conserve the use of resources. To my knowledge, none of these studies were ever implemented: each recommendation gored someone's bureaucratic ox and that effort was totally wasted. I recommended the abolishment of the office.

Q: Personnel matters become matters of much more concern in the State Department than they do in many other organizations don't they because of the constant change, the obvious prestige, etc.?

MILLER: Personnel is a field where my immediate previous comments would have applied in spades. The assignment process is one subject to very complex procedures which are negotiated in great detail with the union, AFSA, and yet are constantly being overridden by pressures above. Joe Blow gets assigned to Asmara, which is not his idea of where he wants to be assigned; he sees somebody up above him, who sees somebody up above him, who in effect goes to either the Director General or the Under Secretary for Management and gets that assignment overturned. So I think the personnel system of the Department is a major problem area.

I recall being very unpopular at a Bureau of Personnel “retreat,” by observing that the more miles that were instituted to assure the rights of the employee being assigned, the more dissatisfied with the system employees seemed to become. At this same retreat, I couldn't help contrasting the rigid defense of the Personnel Bureau's procedures and assignment system that occurred during the formal discussions, with the utter cynicism about the system voiced by the same officials informally in the lunch line.

Q: When the Reagan Administration came in (a change from Democratic philosophy to Republican philosophy) was their a hostile takeover on the management side or was it done in good grace?

MILLER: I don't remember any sense of a hostile takeover. One of the big projects we got involved in at the beginning of the Reagan Administration was the Grace Commission. The President decided he wanted ideas from the private sector for streamlining, rationalizing, reducing costs, etc. The Commission was headed by a businessman W. R. Grace. It had teams that went into every agency of government including the State Department. As Director of Management Operations, I was asked by Dick Kennedy to be the Department's

liaison with this team in the State Department. We had a very good relationship. The people were very interested in what we had to tell them, etc. and they had free rein in the Department. They came up with a lot of recommendations, which to my knowledge, like a lot of other recommendations have never been implemented. You cannot run the State Department or probably any department of government like you run W.R. Grace and Co., partly because it is not designed to meet a bottom line, it is designed to perform services for the public. Also, it is always subject to a lot of pressures both foreign and domestic which mean that it carries out its responsibilities in a rather disorganized, inefficient, haphazard way sometimes. But, no, I do not recall really having the sense of a hostile takeover. There was some question at the beginning whether the senior career people in the Department were going to be switched around, but that happens with every new administration. Some were and some weren't. I was kept in that particular job basically until I finished my tour.

Q: Did you have any feeling that some of the new political appointees in the various geographical and functional bureaus were sort of charging around and trying to put pressure on you to make sure that their particular bailiwick got more resources?

MILLER: Oh, absolutely. We had fights for resources, for positions and for office space. Those went with the territory. We had those constantly. I remember one day being startled by a phone call from George Shultz when Dick Kennedy was out of the country attending a conference. The Director for Management Operations was always acting Under Secretary for Management under such circumstances. Shultz had just been down inspecting the area that Elliott Abrams, then Assistant Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs was occupying. Abrams had complained to him that the management area was long delinquent in refurbishing these offices. So the Secretary of State, himself, called me to complain that we were not serving Elliott Abrams satisfactorily. I saluted and told the Secretary that I would look into it immediately. As it turned out the rug-layers were on their way down there almost before I did anything, I think in accordance with their normal schedule. Anyway, yes, Assistant Secretaries sometime went to the Secretary to put

pressure on Management to get things done. That went with the territory. In the Abrams case, I wrote the Secretary a little note saying that we were taking care of these things and he sent me back a little note that very graciously said, thank you very much for your expeditious action.

Q: You then got another shot as ambassador. You were in the Ivory Coast from 1983 to 86. How did this assignment come about?

MILLER: In the normal course of things. I spent three years as Director for Management Operations and one day was called by Personnel and asked if I would allow my name to be put on a list for the Ivory Coast. I said I had never been to Africa and asked for time to check with my wife to see how she felt about it. I came back and said sure. Somehow my name came out of the hopper and we went off to the Ivory Coast as the representative of President Reagan.

Q: What was the situation in the Ivory Coast in this period?

MILLER: Before I answer that let me say that it took me four or five months from the time I was considered as a nominee for Kuala Lumpur before I was on my way. The process had lengthened to ten months from the time Personnel first called me up to the time that I actually arrived in the Ivory Coast. As I understand it, it has gotten even longer.

Q: What was the delay?

MILLER: The delay is one in the nominating process. The pulling and hauling between the State Department and the White House, the additional requirements in ethics in government forms, for background investigations, for medical examinations—the paper work is just very slow. As it happened my nomination finally went up on the day that the Senate adjourned for more than 30 days, therefore the nomination was sent back to the White House saying it had to be resubmitted.

The situation in the Ivory Coast was a fairly favorable one. The Ivory Coast, like Malaysia, was one of the few success stories among former colonies. The Ivory Coast, even today, is the world's greatest producer of cocoa and the third or fourth greatest producer of coffee. And it also exports a number of other things like tropical hard woods, etc. It was very prosperous and it had a long record of prosperity. What it suffers from today was too great an assumption that that prosperity would continue. It got very heavily in debt, prices of cocoa and coffee dropped and I understand today it is in dire economic straits. But basically while we were there it was a country under civilian leadership, a civilian elected president, who had been elected five times, since the country has been independent, and he is still the president. He is getting very old and people are restive for a change, especially with the turn in the economic situation.

Q: What is his name?

MILLER: Felix Houphouet-Boigny.

Q: When you went out there did you go out with instructions or ideas of what American interests were—what you were trying to accomplish?

MILLER: Yes. The Ivory Coast was an easy country for the United States Ambassador because it basically was supported by France as an ex-French colony and one of many ex-French colonies in West and Central Africa. The United States looked to France to support these countries with aid. Our interest under the Reagan Administration and probably also under previous administrations, was to try to promote US investment in the region. It had concern about subversion via Libya and there were some incidents that occurred during that time which added substance to our concerns, but we didn't pay a great deal of attention to the Ivory Coast because it was: one, too prosperous for our aid; two, it was basically supported by French and we were happy to have it that way. The French ambassador was by far the most visible, highest profile ambassador in the country. Most of the leadership, having been educated in France and having ties with France were

really oriented towards Paris rather than towards Washington. I was fortunate when I got to the Ivory Coast that Houphouet-Boigny had just had a State Visit in Washington with President Reagan and was still basking in the glow of that experience. He had been the first black African leader invited by the Reagan White House for a State Visit; it had been a very successful visit even though relations were not that close and we didn't have a great deal of day-to-day business. But in terms of diplomacy and symbolism I was able to enjoy the fruits of that visit for most of my stay there.

Q: Were there any particular things that we wanted to get out of the Ivory Coast government at that time?

MILLER: We were very interested in their support in the UN and on our Southern Africa negotiations. During the time that I was there the Ivory Coast was close to the top of the Third World countries in the number of times it voted with us in the UN or at least not against us. That was a very happy situation; even though they sometimes took positions that we didn't like, they took a lot of other positions in support of our objectives.

We also wanted their support and understanding on our negotiations in Southern Africa. Every so often I would get instructions to brief either the foreign minister or the President himself on what Assistant Secretary Crocker was doing in Southern Africa. Houphouet-Boigny is one of the grand old men of Africa and is in touch with everybody. He even had quiet contacts with the South Africans and was seeing people like Jonas Savimbi and Dos Santos in Angola. Therefore he was somebody we were anxious to keep up to date on our negotiations in Southern Africa.

We wanted his support and understanding and, hopefully, his work with fellow African leaders after the President decided to attack Libyan targets. Houphouet was really very supportive of these US efforts. I use to argue that because Houphouet was so supportive we ought to pay more attention to him; that he was more useful to us and more important to us than our policy towards him would suggest, but I never got very far.

Q: Was there very much we could do for him? What could we have done that we didn't do?

MILLER: I think that we could have taken him more into our confidence than we did. Even though we briefed him regularly, we really didn't confide in him or consult him on moves we were about to make. I think we could have done more to bolster the Ivory Coast economy. We could have done more to recognize the support we were getting from him in the United Nations. They were conscious of the fact that we didn't pay much attention to the Ivory Coast. So I think we could have built a relationship that was more direct and closer in a number of ways without saying that it should have been based on a lot of aid.

Q: Did you have much to do with the French ambassador? Would you use the French ambassador as an intermediary?

MILLER: No, the relationship between the French and ourselves in parts of the world where the French have predominate interests is always a touchy one. We were very friendly, the French ambassador and I, socially. We would exchange information, but basically he wasn't very forth-coming. He never took the initiative, as I recall, to brief me on developments that he was aware of. Some of his staff were more helpful to our staff, but he was rather standoffish. The French were always, in my experience, concerned if we were too active; had we been more active in the Ivory Coast, they would have been convinced that we were doing it to supplant them, to get them out of there. That was one thing that Washington didn't want to do.

Q: In doing these interviews it seems a constant theme in French Africa—the concern by the French that we are trying to supplant them.

MILLER: It is indeed a constant theme. It is a sensitivity on the part of the French that is misplaced. On the other hand, if we had gotten closer to Houphouet and he had spent more of his time worrying about what Washington thought or was doing than what Paris was doing, this would have been seen as inroads in their preserve. Even though they deny

that the Ivory Coast and these other countries in Africa were their preserve, in effect they were their “chasse gardee.” And they wanted it to stay that way. It was hard to convince Washington that we should be more active and it was hard to be active. The French had ways of deflecting or thwarting us because they had advisers in the ministries, etc. So it is an ongoing problem that hasn't been solved and, as long as France wants to main its position in these countries, I think we will be happy because it means their resources and not ours—and basically they are allies of ours.

Q: Were the events in Chad concerning Libya taking place at that time? There we were playing a much more active role along with the French.

MILLER: Yes, we were pressing the French, of course, to stay out in front. We were providing them with transport for their forces, etc. and providing them equipment. That was another area in which we kept Houphouet briefed and he was pleased with what we and the French were doing in Chad. He was very much concerned about Libyan intrusion into the center of Central and West Africa if it had gone too far in Chad. So he was cooperative, sympathetic and supportive vis-a-vis other African leaders on Chad.

Q: In Washington did you feel there wasn't a lot of attention as far as instructions from the Desk, etc.?

MILLER: The Bureau of African affairs, of course, has a problem. It has twice as many countries to deal with as any other geographic bureau. Many of these are small countries where we don't have many interests, but just bureaucratically it is hard for one assistant secretary and his deputies to pay much attention to any one country other than a crisis country. Even the Office of West African Affairs, which was the office backstopping me in the Ivory Coast, had one office director and 16 countries and a problem—the western Sahara. I always felt that even the office director didn't have the time to pay enough attention to our problems and what we were trying to encourage Washington to do with respect to the Ivory Coast. Chet Crocker, of course, understandably, was almost totally

involved with Southern Africa. He spent most of his eight years working on that problem and in the end he proved to have been able to accomplish something. There were other crises like Chad, the Horn of Africa, etc. which kept the rest of his attention. So a quiet, little, prosperous country where we assumed France was going to take the leading role, was just a country we couldn't get much attention to. And I guess I can understand that, but sometimes it was rather frustrating to try to get answers out of Washington, and favorable answers to things we were trying to do.

Q: You left Abidjan in 1986. Is that right?

MILLER: Yes.

Q: Then you came to a position at the National Defense University.

MILLER: Yes. When my third year in Abidjan was marching along and I knew someone was in the pipeline behind me, Dennis Kux, I started inquiring about my next assignment. To make a long story short, I was sent as Vice President to the National Defense University. It was a very interesting out-of-area, out-of- Department assignment. It's a position that has traditionally been filled by a senior Foreign Service officer who has served as an ambassador, because of the long State-Defense relationship with the War College and the Industrial College. When the University superstructure was created about 15 years ago, it was agreed between State and Defense that the same structure would be followed, namely, that the number two person, the vice president, would also come from the State Department. I succeeded Bruce Laingen, who had been there for five years after he came out of Tehran as our senior hostage. Basically it was a kind of senior academic administrative position. I would advise the president, who is a 3-star general and rotated among the services and in my time an Air Force 3-star general. I would give him advice on the activities of the University and act as his senior liaison person with the Director General in the Department.

The big issues that were being dealt with while I was there were issues of joint professional military education. Certain Congressmen had great interest in the subject and were concerned that the educational programs at the National Defense University were not sufficiently joint (inter-service) in their approach. Therefore they were pressing the Pentagon to re-do the curriculum and re-do the whole educational structure. While I was an “innocent bystander” in these issues, I did have views and ideas on the subject as an independent observer which I volunteered to the president from time to time, which I think he found useful.

Q: In talking to my colleagues who went to the war college one thing they commented on was that the military seemed to have a warped view of the State Department as being an overly peaceful type of operation and not being able to deal with things. Did you find that there was a real divergence between the State Department people and the military?

MILLER: Well, yes, I think there is a built-in bureaucratic and professional difference of view between the military and the State Department officer. But that is exactly the purpose of the college year to let each see the other up close—to exchange views. And I think it is safe to say that by the end of that year the Foreign Service officer has a better appreciation for the responsibilities of the military officer and vice versa. Of course, a lot of them develop contacts and friendships that are useful as their careers continue.

Q: I think it is much more important now because in our time you could almost rely on almost every male Foreign Service officer to have served in the military, and that just isn't so today.

MILLER: On the other hand there is also, post Vietnam, an interesting instinct on the part of the military not to resort to the use of military force unless the issues, objectives and outcome are clear. You have more cases today than you may have had some years ago where the Foreign Service officer is proposing the use of force and the military is saying,

“wait a minute, you don't realize the consequences of what you are proposing.” And those kinds of exchanges are also healthy and useful.

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The interview ended here. Following his assignment as Vice President of the National Defense University (1986-89), Ambassador Miller spent two years as Diplomat-in-Residence at George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs. He retired on March 31, 1991.

End of interview